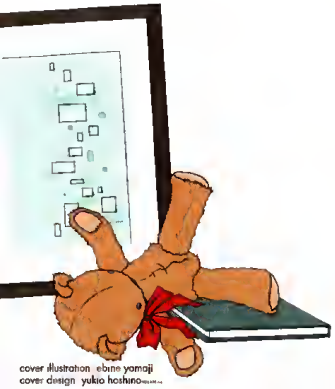

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cover design yukio hoshino

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LOVE MY LIFE
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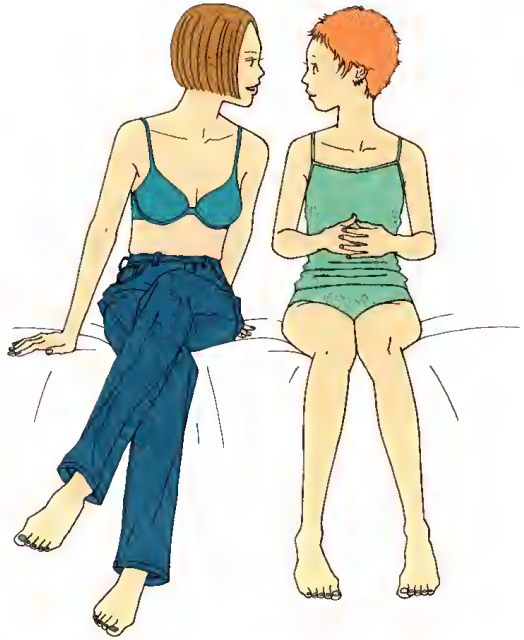

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LOVE MY LIFE

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ebine yamaji

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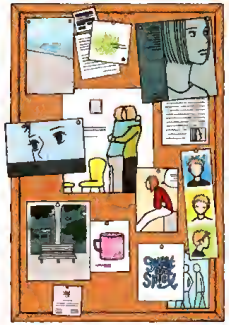

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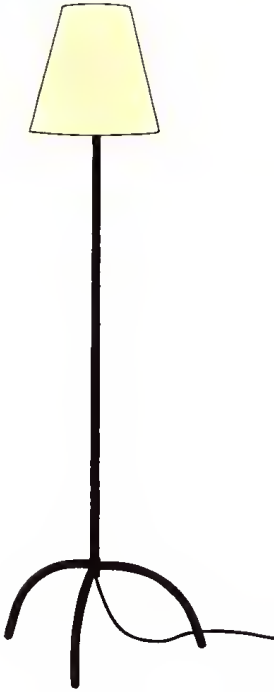

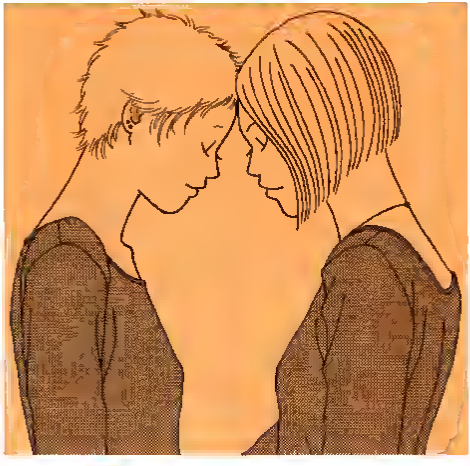

LOVE MY LIFE

ebine yamaji

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LOVE MY LIFE

やまじえびね

ebine yamaji

Translation
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Proofreading
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Scans & Editing
Nomad Soul

kotonoha monkey-pirate com

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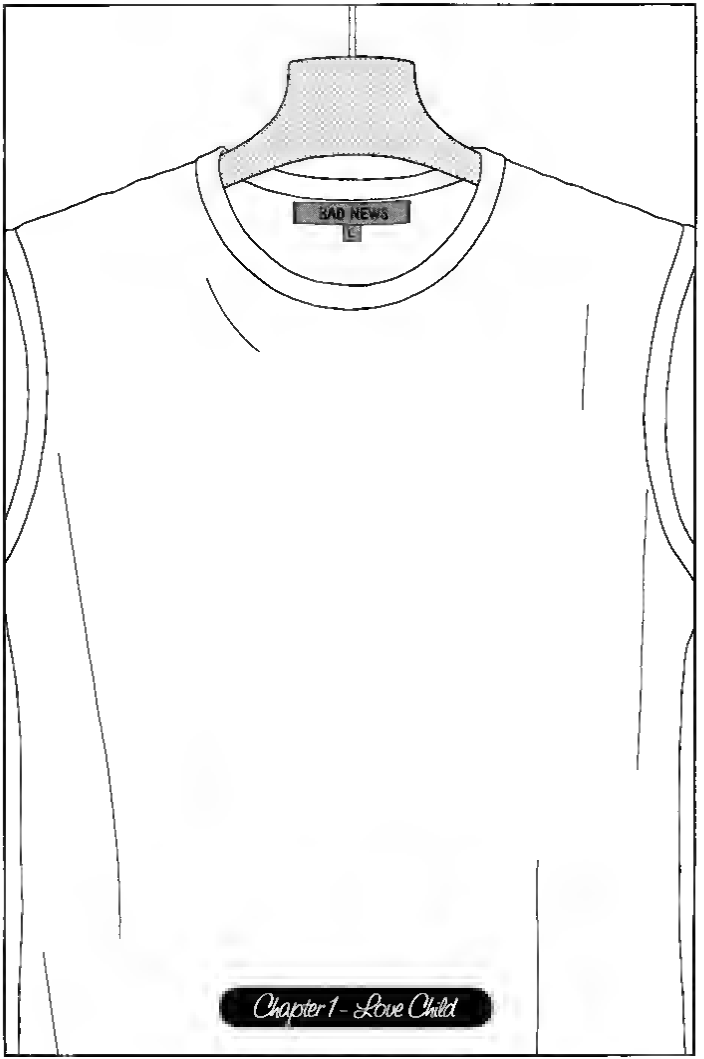
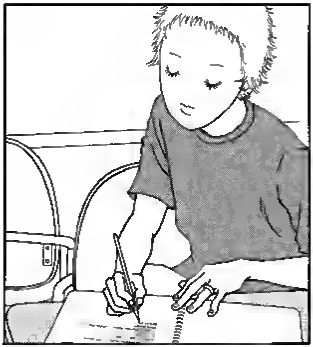
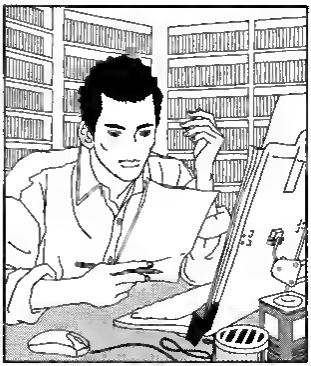


Chapter 1 - Love Child

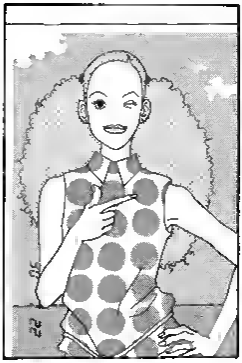
My mother grew ill and died seven years ago, since then I've been living alone with my father.



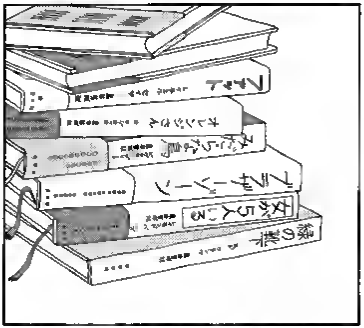
Hello. Let me introduce myself: Ichiko Izumiya, 18, I'm studying English in a language school. You can see me working on the left.



On the right is a photo of my beloved mother; to the left, my darling father, working at his desk.

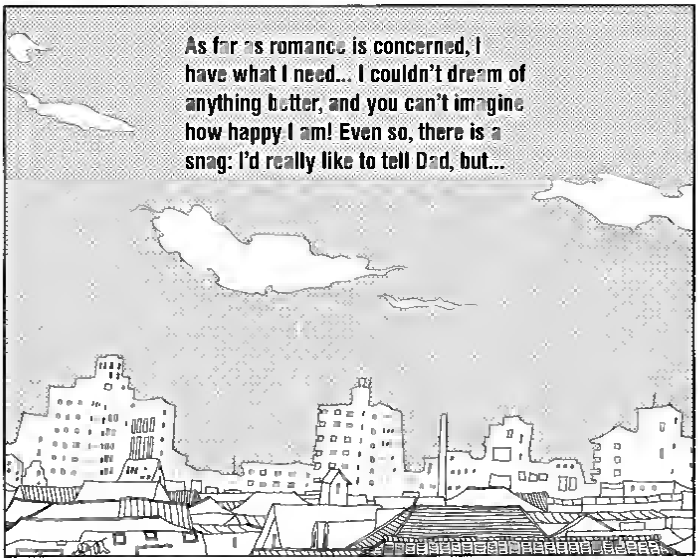


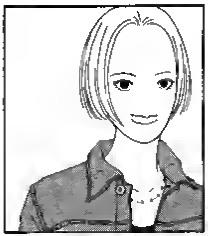
He's a heck of a guy, who's already translated loads of trendy modern American novels.



He's an assistant professor and a freelance translator

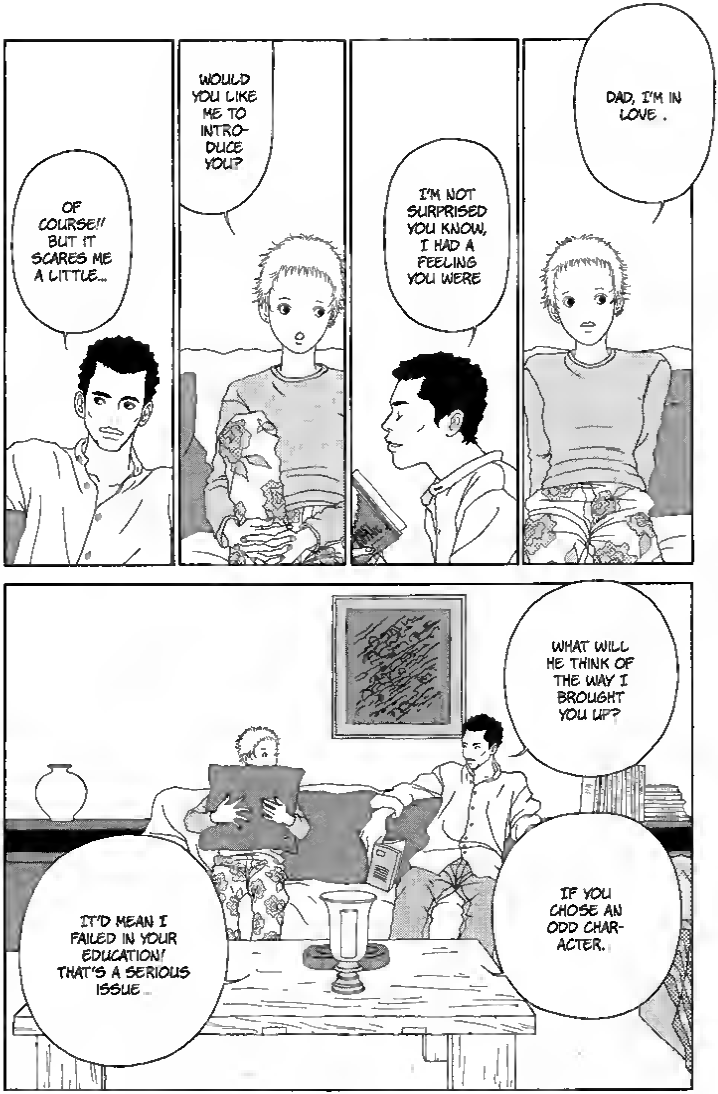
Book titles (from top): "Fat" by Rachel Thayer "Mr. Orange" by Mark Brock, "The Naughty Bird" by Beverley Green "Brother Zone" "Five Women" by Raymond Burns "Green Socks" by Ed Kranz.
All books were translated by Housei IZUMIYA.


As far as romance is concerned, I have what I need... I couldn't dream of anything better, and you can't imagine how happy I am! Even so, there is a snag: I'd really like to tell Dad, but...



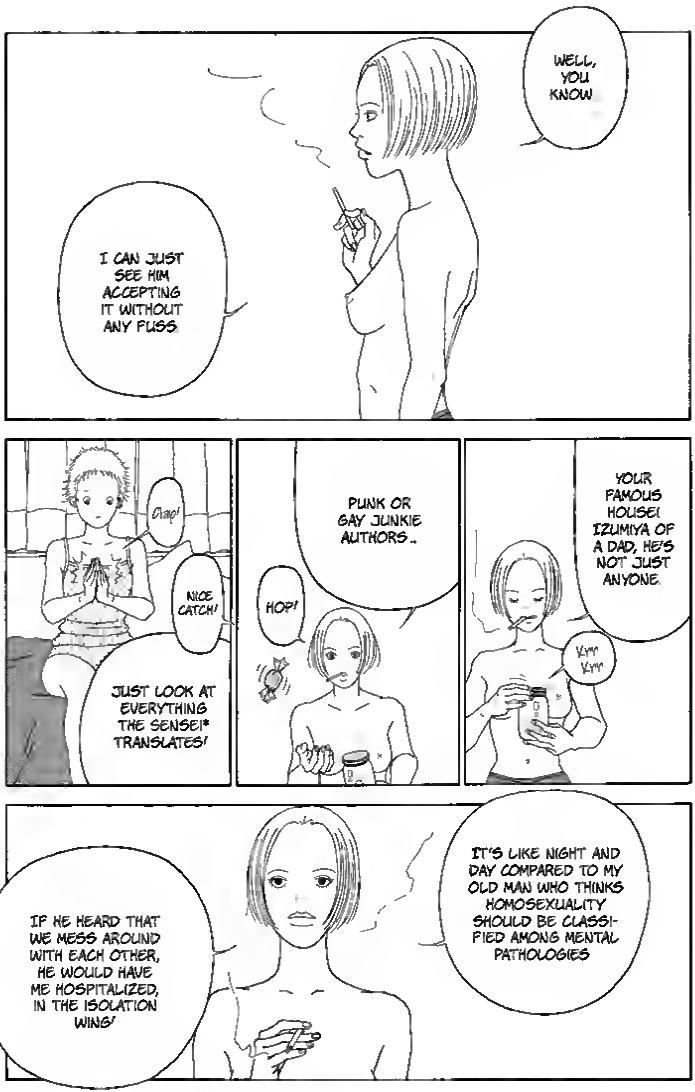
Eri Joujima, 21, student.

In short, it's not a guy.


DAD, I'M IN LOVE.
I'M NOT SURPRISED YOU KNOW, I HAD A FEELING YOU WERE
WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO INTRO-DUCE YOU?
OF COURSE!! BUT IT SCARES ME A LITTLE...
WHAT WILL HE THINK OF THE WAY I BROUGHT YOU UP?
IF YOU CHOSE AN ODD CHAR-ACTER,
IT'D MEAN I FAILED IN YOUR EDUCATION! THAT'S A SERIOUS ISSUE...

WELL, IT'S TRUE THAT IN LIFE...
YOU CAN NEVER AVOID MESSING SOME THINGS UP...
IS HE REALLY THAT KIND OF PERSON?
SO IF IT HAPPENED TO BE...
A CHARACTER, AS YOU SAY, DO YOU PROMISE NOT TO GO NUTS?
I DON'T KNOW A MORE WONDERFUL ONE!
SMOOCH
SMOOCH

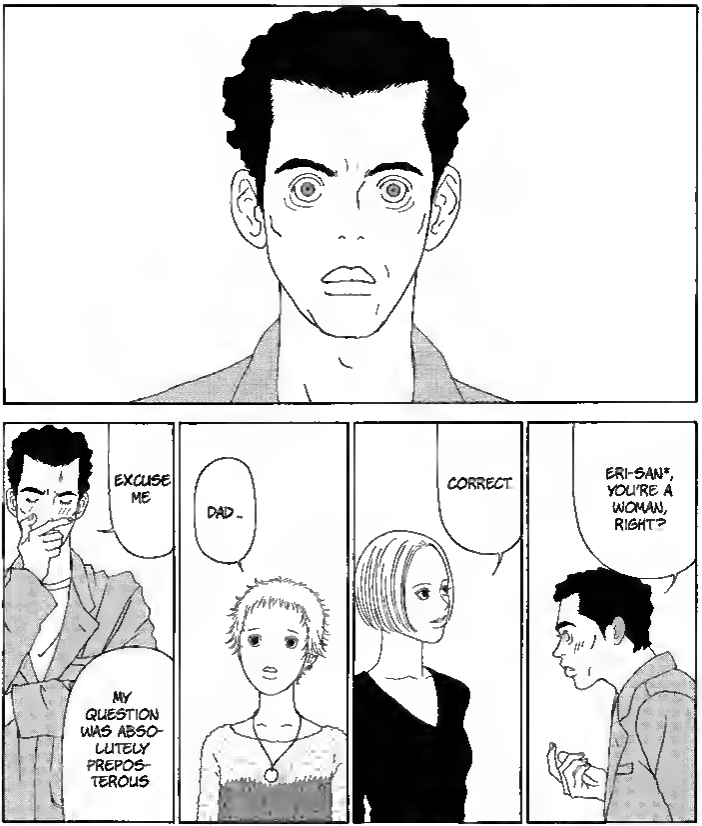
But who knows what Dad will say, huh, Erl?


WELL, YOU KNOW
I CAN JUST SEE HIM ACCEPTING IT WITHOUT ANY FUSS
Clap!
NICE CATCH!
JUST LOOK AT EVERYTHING THE SENSEI* TRANSLATES!
PUNK OR GAY JUNKIE AUTHORS...
HOP!
YOUR FAMOUS HOUSE! IZUMIYA OF A DAD, HE'S NOT JUST ANYONE.
Yum Yum
IT'S LIKE NIGHT AND DAY COMPARED TO MY OLD MAN WHO THINKS HOMOSEXUALITY SHOULD BE CLASSIFIED AMONG MENTAL PATHOLOGIES
IF HE HEARD THAT WE MESS AROUND WITH EACH OTHER, HE WOULD HAVE ME HOSPITALIZED, IN THE ISOLATION WING!

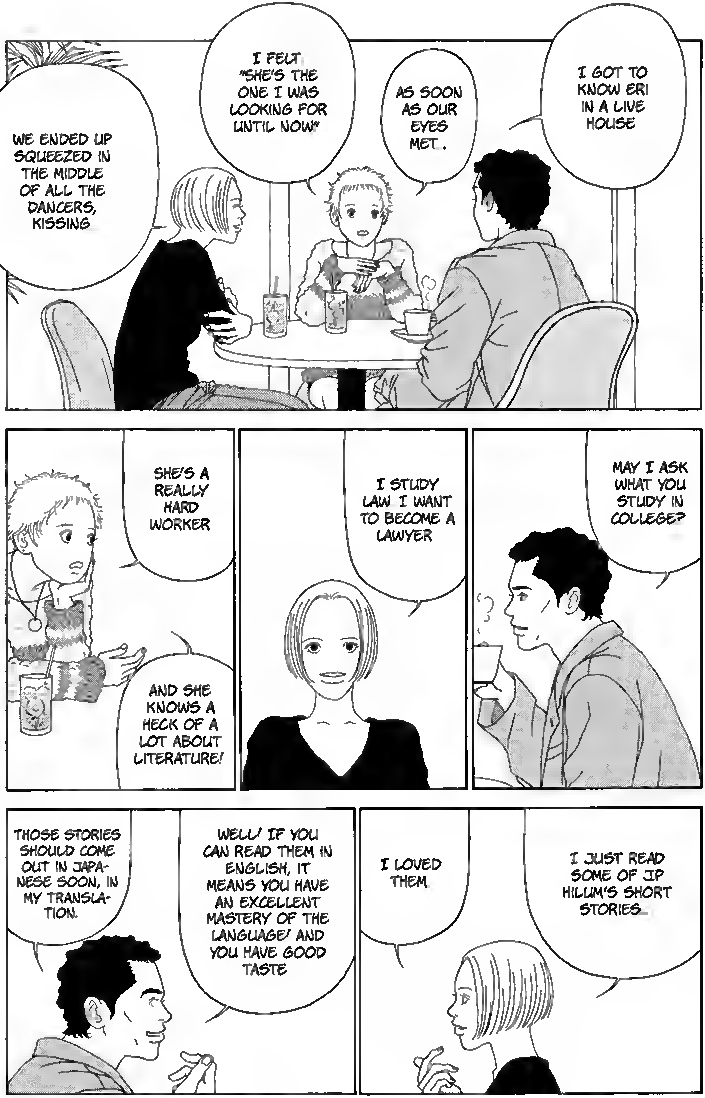
* Sensei: A respectful form of address for teachers, doctors, lawyers, authors and other creative artists held in high esteem

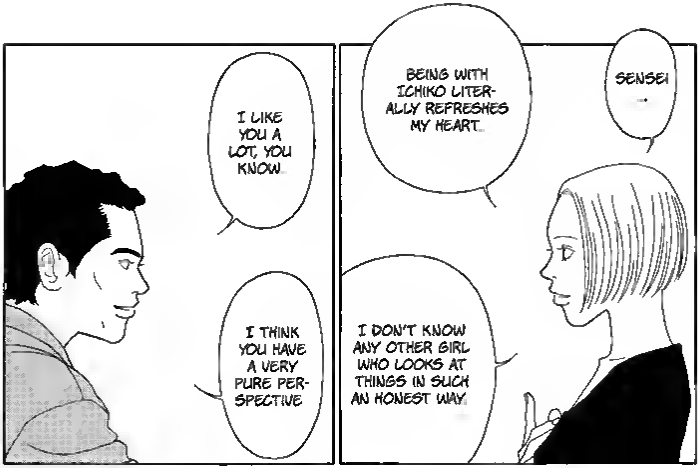
AT LEAST LONG ENOUGH TO FINISH SCHOOL
PSHHT
ARE YOU DETERMINED TO HIDE IT FROM YOUR PARENTS MUCH LONGER, ERI?
YOU NEEDN'T WORRY, SINCE I'M TELLING YOU HE'LL AGREE
ON THE OTHER HAND, I'D LOVE TO MEET YOUR DAD
HEY, CAN I HAVE THAT PIECE OF CANDY?
YOU THINK SO?

And here's how it happened.

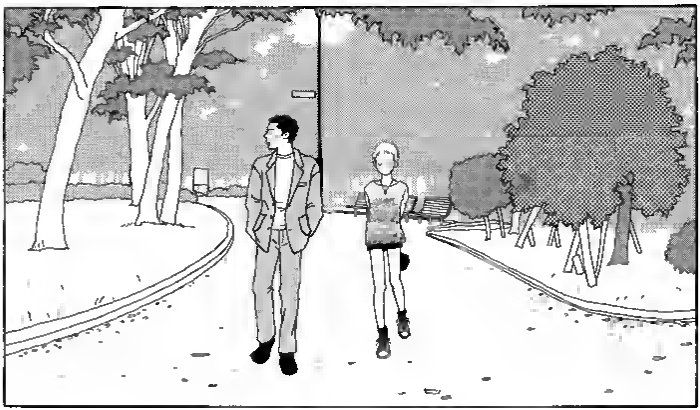


* san: A respectful name suffix. It's the closest equivalent to the English Mr. or Ms. However, it can be attached to first names as well.

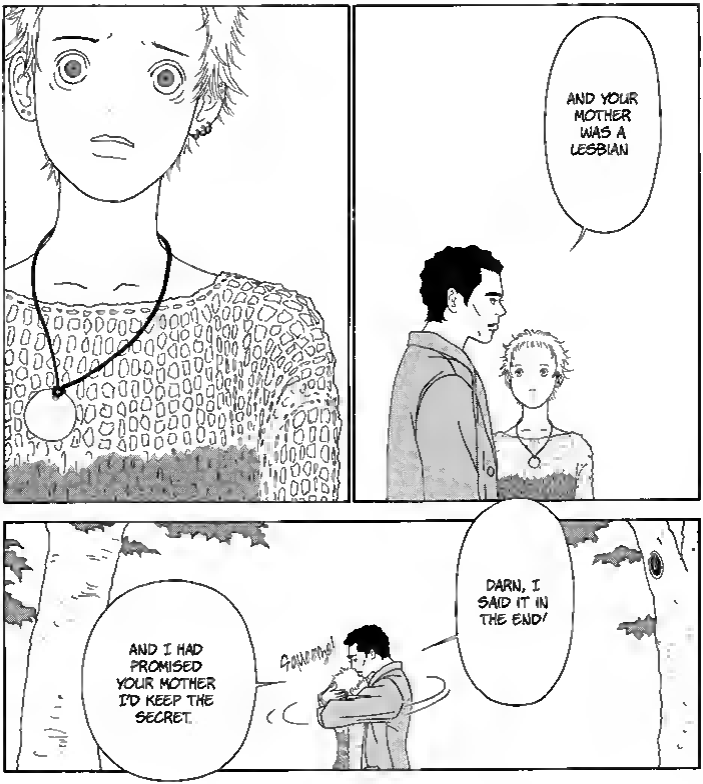

I GOT TO KNOW ERI IN A LIVE HOUSE
AS SOON AS OUR EYES MET.
I FELT "SHE'S THE ONE I WAS LOOKING FOR UNTIL NOW"
WE ENDED UP SQUEEZED IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THE DANCERS, KISSING
MAY I ASK WHAT YOU STUDY IN COLLEGE?
I STUDY LAW I WANT TO BECOME A LAWYER
SHE'S A REALLY HARD WORKER
AND SHE KNOWS A HECK OF A LOT ABOUT LITERATURE!
I JUST READ SOME OF JP HILUM'S SHORT STORIES...
I LOVED THEM.
WELL! IF YOU CAN READ THEM IN ENGLISH, IT MEANS YOU HAVE AN EXCELLENT MASTERY OF THE LANGUAGE! AND YOU HAVE GOOD TASTE
THOSE STORIES SHOULD COME OUT IN JAPANESE SOON, IN MY TRANSLATION.


I LIKE YOU A LOT, YOU KNOW.
I THINK YOU HAVE A VERY PURE PERSPECTIVE
BEING WITH ICHIKO LITERALLY REFRESHES MY HEART.
SENSEI
I DON'T KNOW ANY OTHER GIRL WHO LOOKS AT THINGS IN SUCH AN HONEST WAY.

Then, Eri went to her job and Dad and I took our time walking home.



DAD
YES?
I THOUGHT ICHIKO ISN'T OUR DAUGHTER FOR NOTHING
I CAN IMAGINE!
I AM
ARE YOU SURPRISED?
I'M GAY TOO..
HUH?

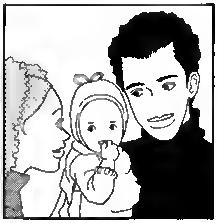


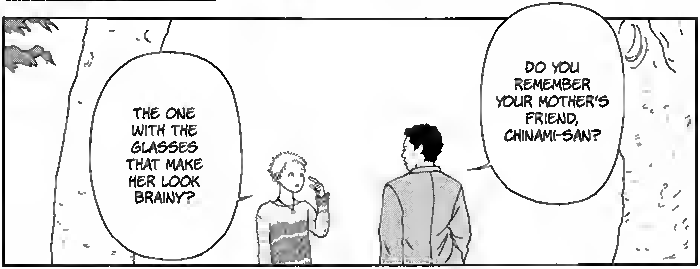
One day, fate left us both heartbroken and we consoled each other.

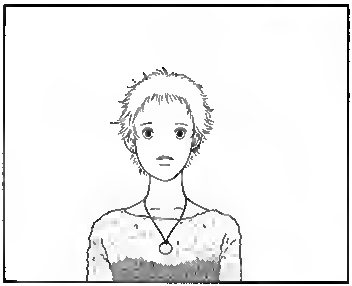
I was not in love with your mother, but we were good friends.

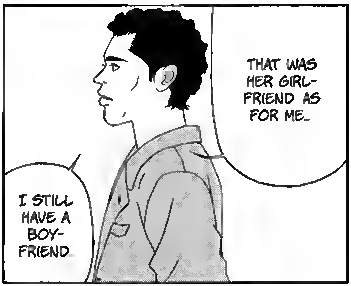
I WANT TO HAVE A CHILD
I WANT TO START A FAMILY
What a surprise! No wonder, I was also thinking about the same thing
In the conversation, your mother blurted out
RIGHT NOW EVEN...
WELL I CAN, YOU KNOW...
Clink
I DID SLEEP WITH A BOY, ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO
We went to a Love Hotel and on our way back, we decided to get married.
Our gay, lesbian and other friends criticized us for getting into a fake marriage, but they were wrong.

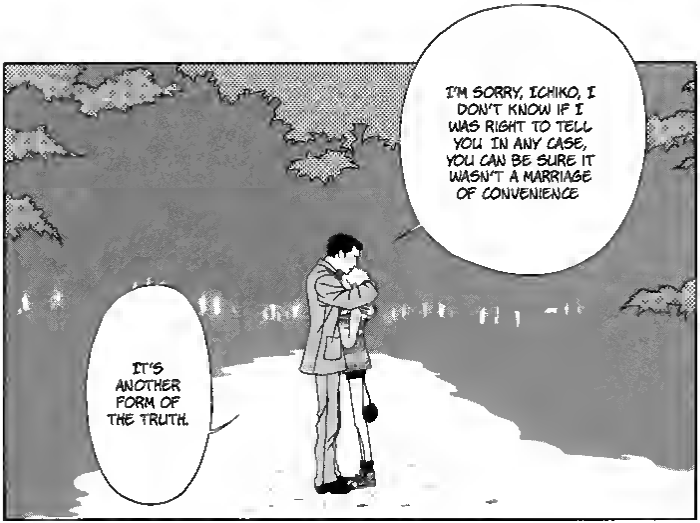
Your birth delighted us both Of course, life is made of mistakes but we were positive we had done the most beautiful act there was.







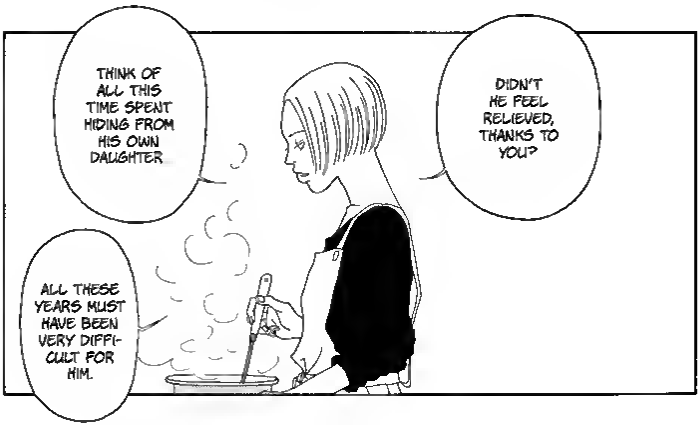


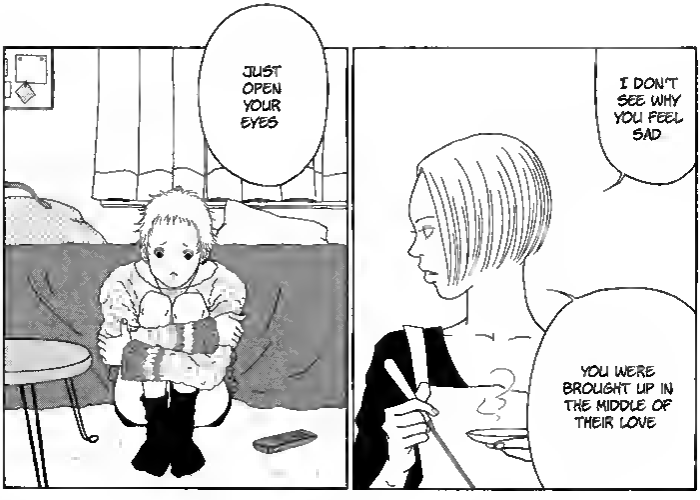

I'M SORRY, ICHIKO, I DON'T KNOW IF I WAS RIGHT TO TELL YOU IN ANY CASE, YOU CAN BE SURE IT WASN'T A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE
IT'S ANOTHER FORM OF THE TRUTH.

I felt a kind of sadness deep inside of me, which I couldn't explain.

That night, Dad let me sleep over at Eri's.

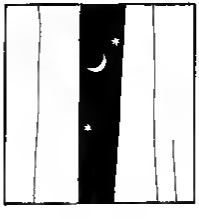
Everything was spinning in my head.


THINK OF ALL THIS TIME SPENT HIDING FROM HIS OWN DAUGHTER.
DIDN'T HE FEEL RELIEVED, THANKS TO YOU?
ALL THESE YEARS MUST HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFICULT FOR HIM.

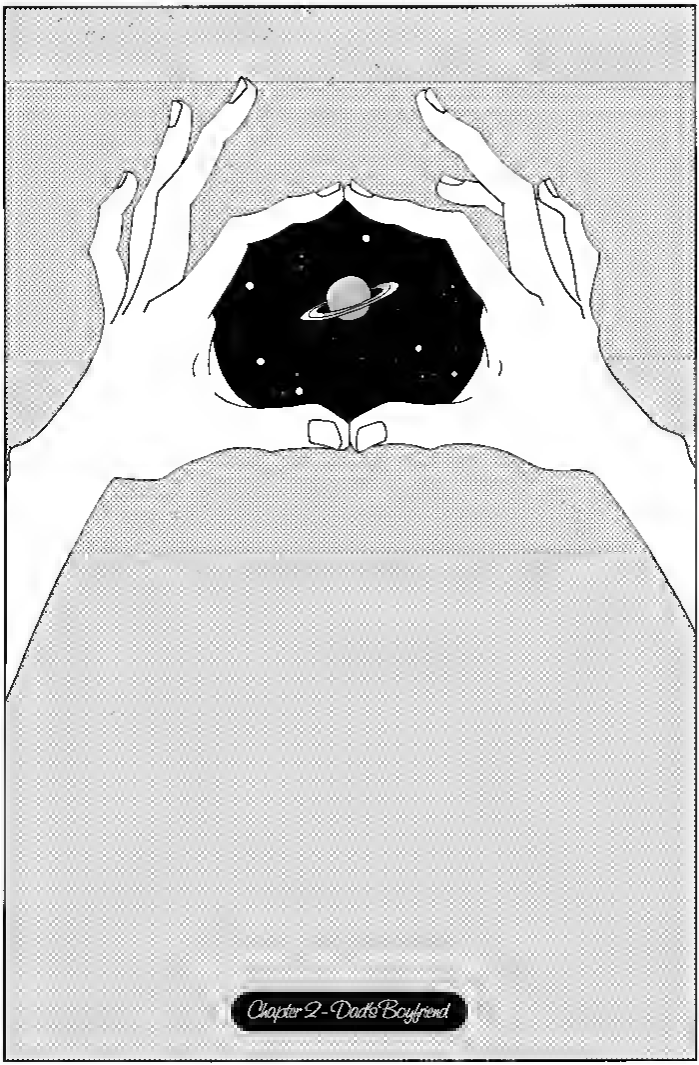


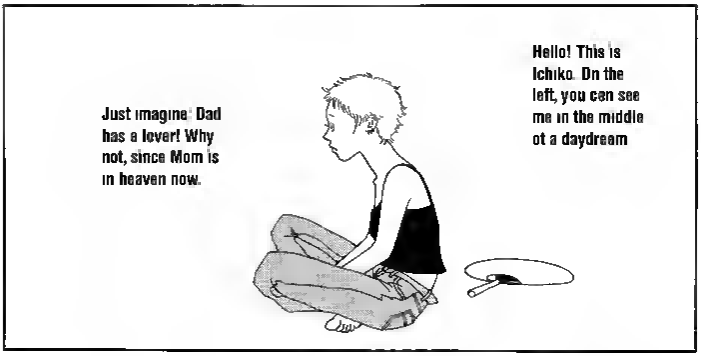
Dad acknowledged our relationship, that's why he revealed his secret to me. I must be happy about that.

Thanks to you, Dad, I'm the happiest girl, thanks! Come on, be happy, Ichiko, laugh!

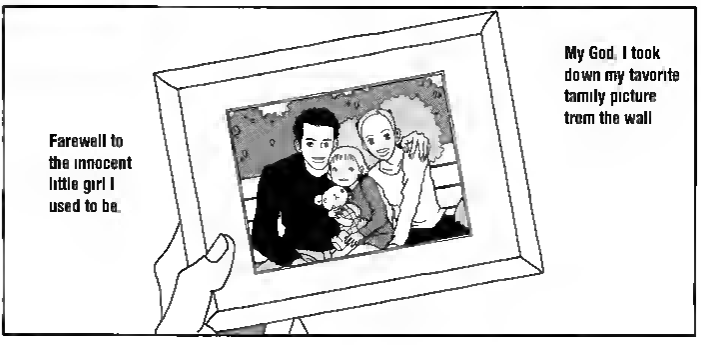


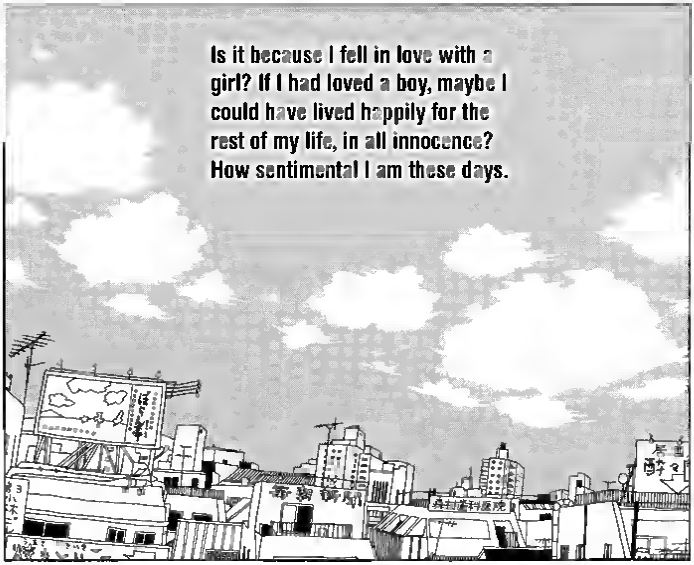
I fell asleep by Eri's side as I was telling myself that.

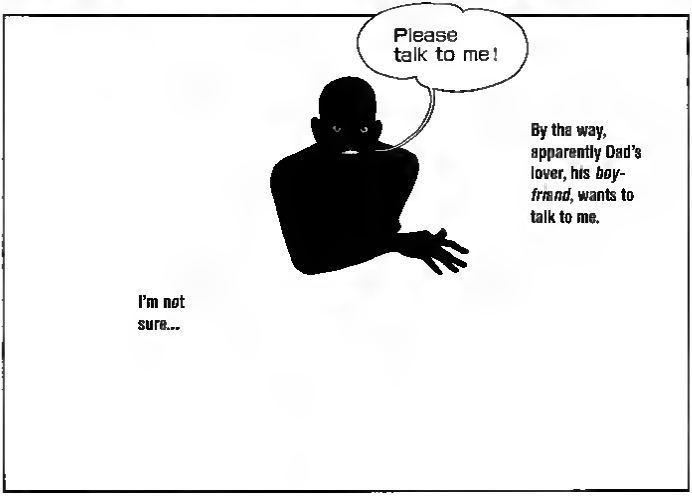

Chapter 2 - Dad's Boyfriend

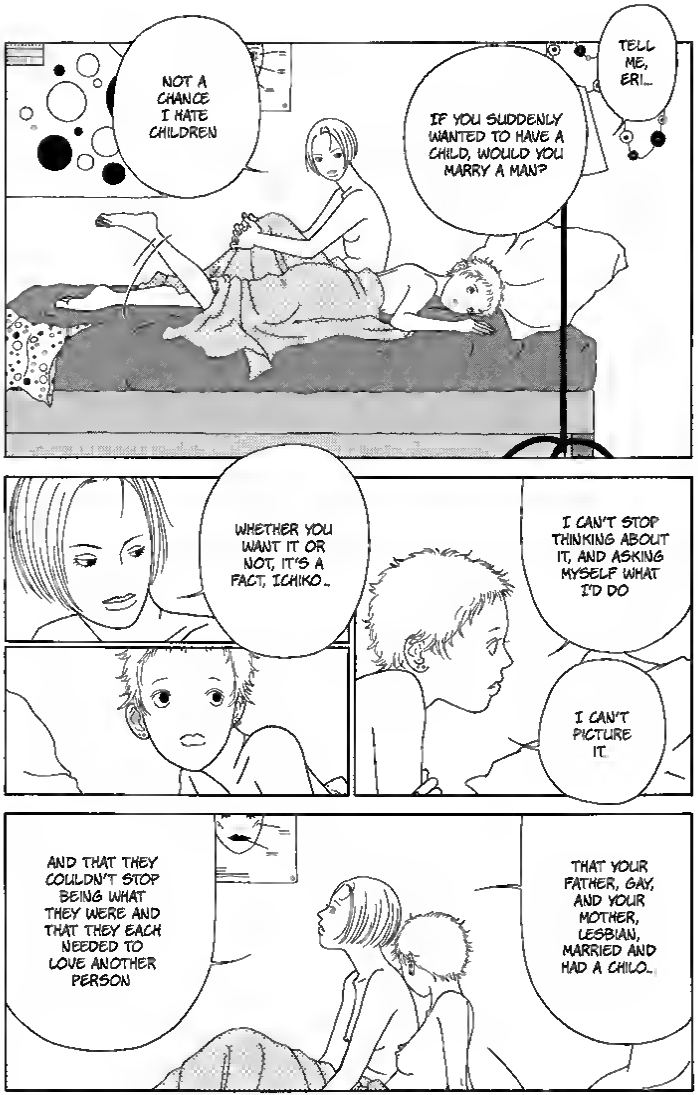

Hello! This is Ichiko. On the left, you can see me in the middle of a daydream
Just imagine! Dad has a lover! Why not, since Mom is in heaven now.

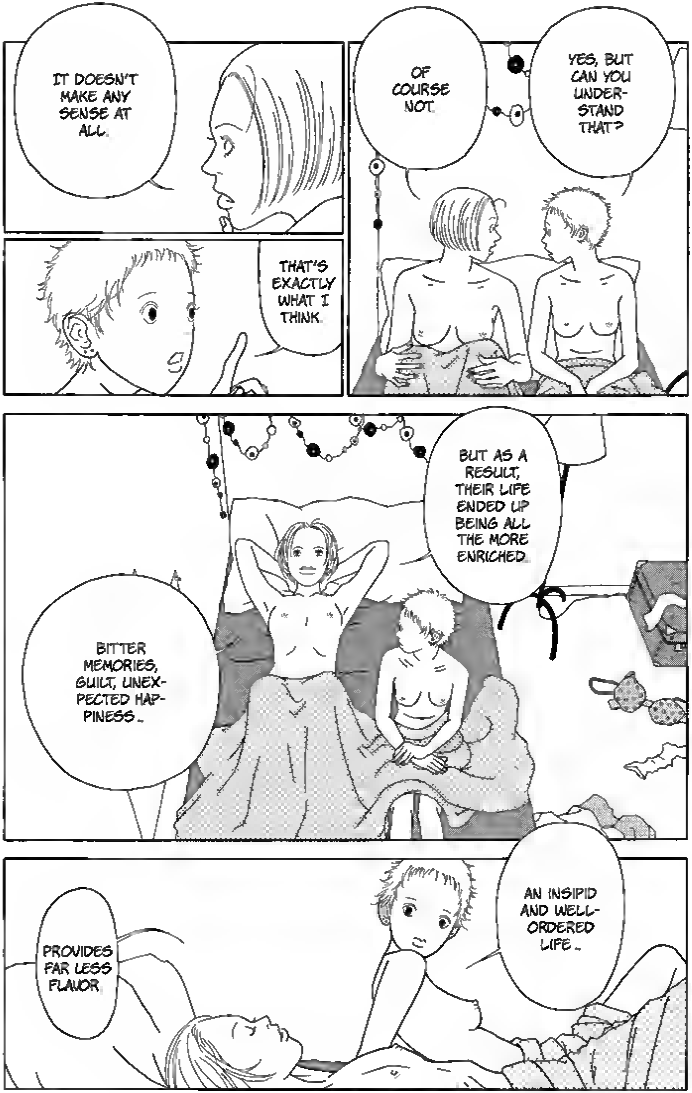
The thing is, the father whom I love so much turned out to be gay.
Dad, gay! And Mom, a lesbian!!

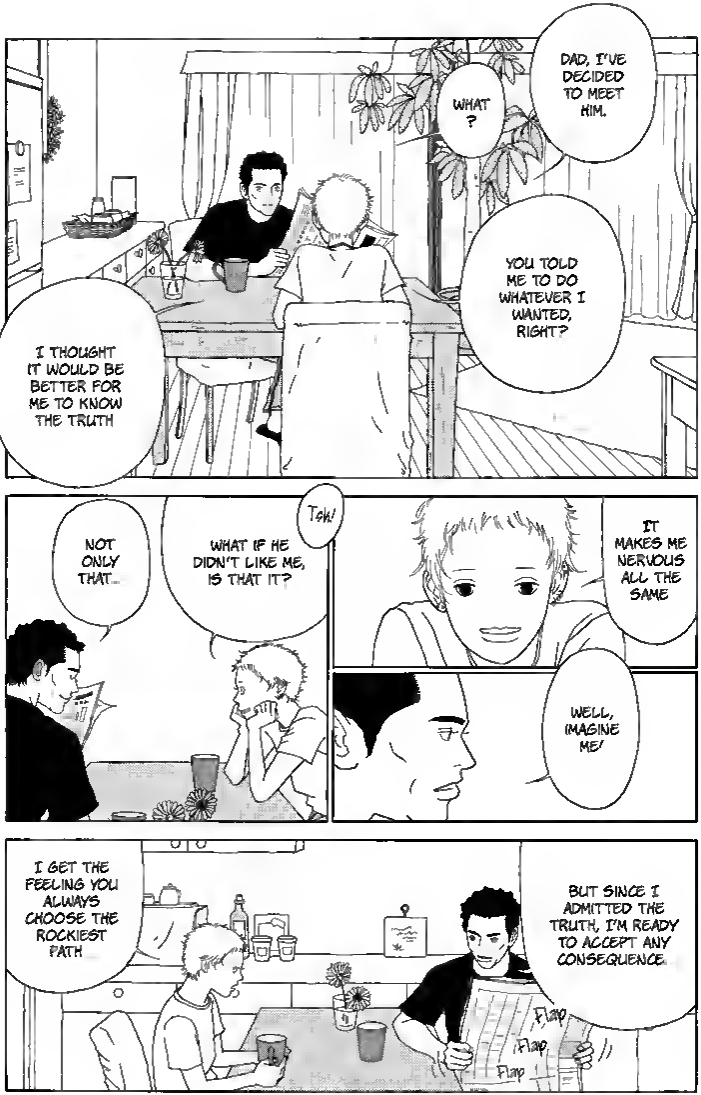

My God. I took down my favorite family picture from the wall
Farewell to the innocent little girl I used to be.

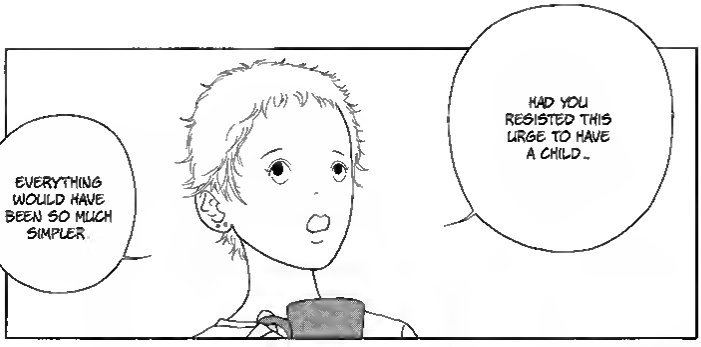

Is it because I fell in love with a girl? If I had loved a boy, maybe I could have lived happily for the rest of my life, in all innocence? How sentimental I am these days.

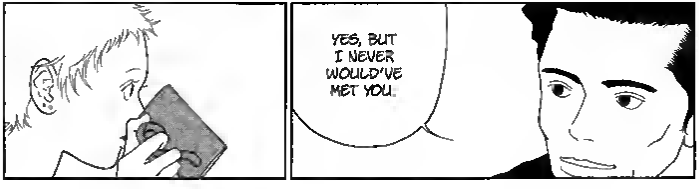

Please talk to me!
By the way, apparently Dad's lover, his *boy-frmnd*, wants to talk to me.
I'm not sure...

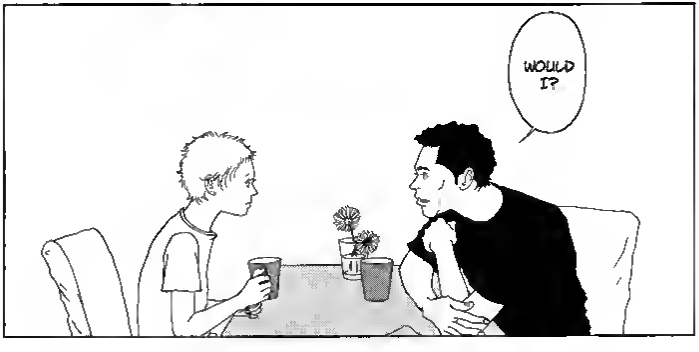

TELL ME, ERI...
IF YOU SUDDENLY WANTED TO HAVE A CHILD, WOULD YOU MARRY A MAN?
NOT A CHANCE I HATE CHILDREN
I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT IT, AND ASKING MYSELF WHAT I'D DO
I CAN'T PICTURE IT.
WHETHER YOU WANT IT OR NOT, IT'S A FACT, ICHIKO..
THAT YOUR FATHER, GAY, AND YOUR MOTHER, LESBIAN, MARRIED AND HAD A CHILD..
AND THAT THEY COULDN'T STOP BEING WHAT THEY WERE AND THAT THEY EACH NEEDED TO LOVE ANOTHER PERSON


IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE AT ALL.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I THINK.
OF COURSE NOT.
YES, BUT CAN YOU UNDER-STAND THAT?
BUT AS A RESULT, THEIR LIFE ENDED UP BEING ALL THE MORE ENRICHED.
BITTER MEMORIES, GUILT, UNEX-PECTED HAP-PINESS...
AN INSIPID AND WELL-ORDERED LIFE...
PROVIDES FAR LESS FLAVOR.

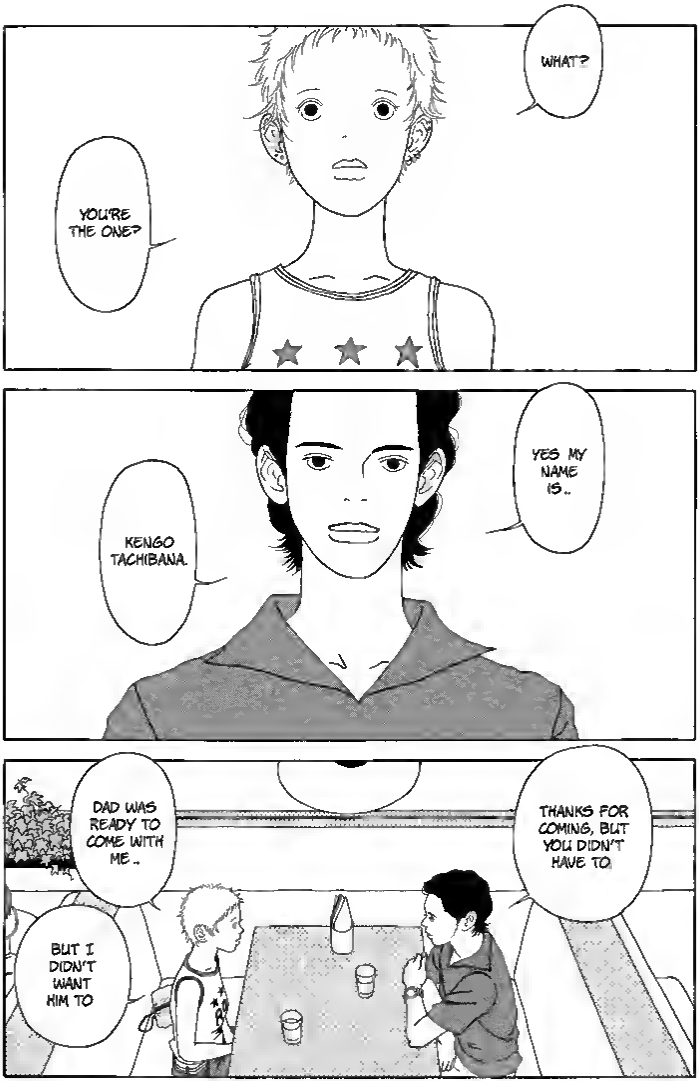

DAD, I'VE DECIDED TO MEET HIM.
WHAT ?
YOU TOLD ME TO DO WHATEVER I WANTED, RIGHT?
I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR ME TO KNOW THE TRUTH
IT MAKES ME NERVOUS ALL THE SAME
WELL, IMAGINE ME!
Tch!
WHAT IF HE DIDN'T LIKE ME, IS THAT IT?
NOT ONLY THAT...
I GET THE FEELING YOU ALWAYS CHOOSE THE ROCKIEST PATH
BUT SINCE I ADMITTED THE TRUTH, I'M READY TO ACCEPT ANY CONSEQUENCE.
Flap
Flap
Flap





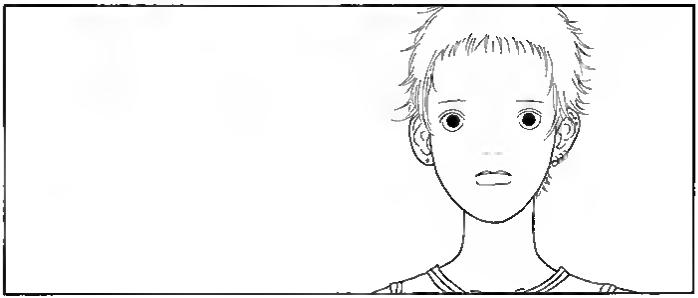


The scheduled Sunday arrived...

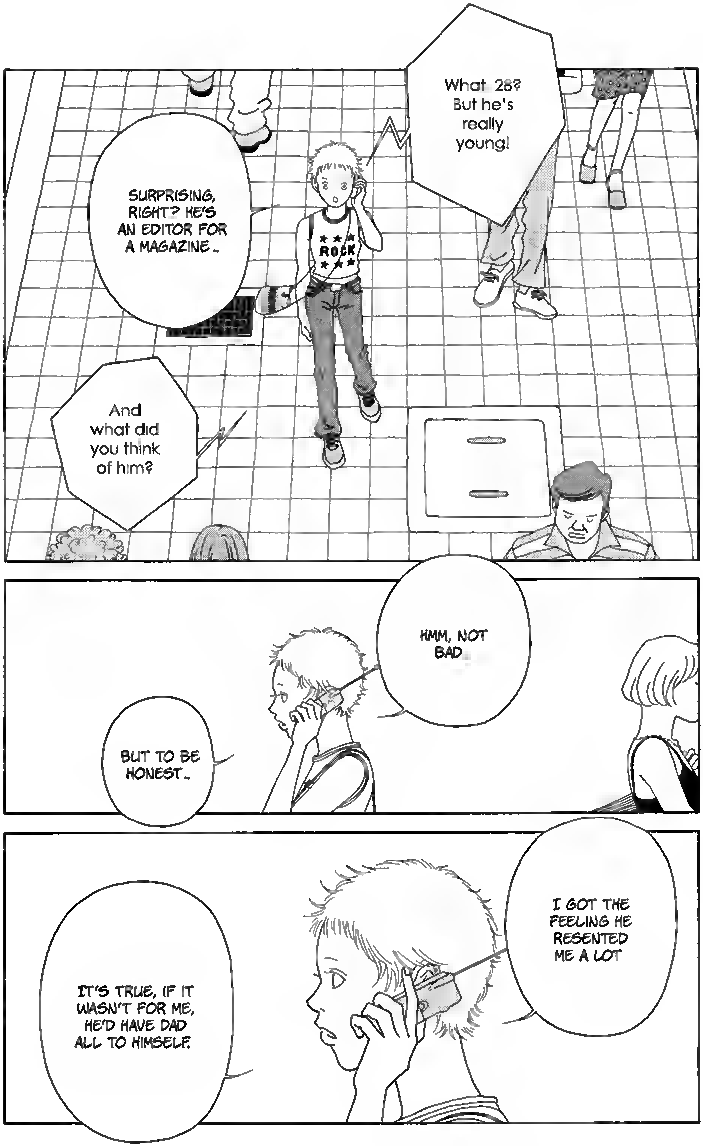

WHAT?
YOU'RE THE ONE?
YES MY NAME IS..
KENGO TACHIBANA.
THANKS FOR COMING, BUT YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO.
DAD WAS READY TO COME WITH ME..
BUT I DIDN'T WANT HIM TO

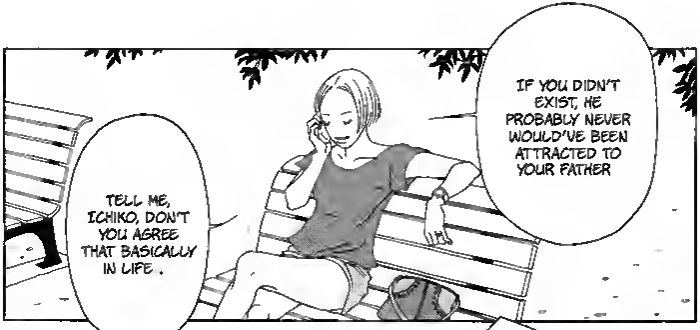
YOUR ORDERS.
Thanks
ME TOO!
FACE TO FACE LIKE THIS, WORDS FAIL ME
DEFINITELY NO WAY.
BUT IT'S BETTER THIS WAY
IT AVOIDS TOO MUCH INTIMACY.
I'M NOT SAYING THAT OUT OF SPITE...
WE DON'T LIVE IN THE SAME WORLD

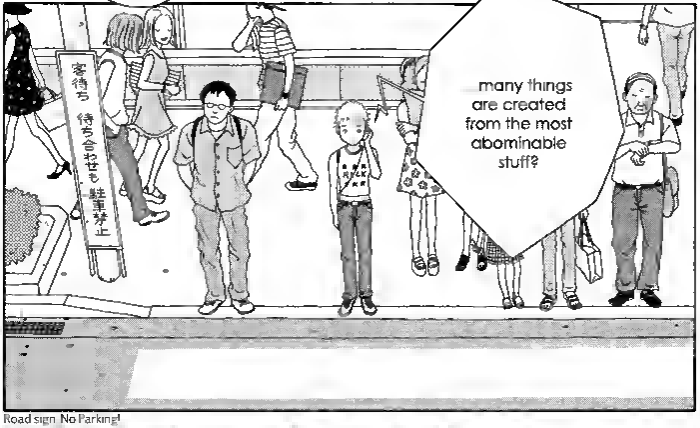
It's like the two of us live on two different planets and your father is the only starship that can travel back and forth between those planets.
I can't breath on your planet, and you can't live on mine.
IT WAS SIMPLY TO PROTECT MY OWN WORLD.
I'VE NEVER SET FOOT IN YOUR WORLD...
IF, FOR THE THREE YEARS I'VE BEEN SEEING HIM...
THAT DECISION WASN'T FOR YOU OR FOR HIM...
TO PROTECT WHAT YOUR FATHER MEANS TO ME



When we left each other, he said we'd probably never meet again


What 28? But he's really young!
SURPRISING, RIGHT? HE'S AN EDITOR FOR A MAGAZINE..
ROCK
And what did you think of him?
HMM, NOT BAD..
BUT TO BE HONEST..
I GOT THE FEELING HE RESENTED ME A LOT
IT'S TRUE, IF IT WASN'T FOR ME, HE'D HAVE DAD ALL TO HIMSELF.

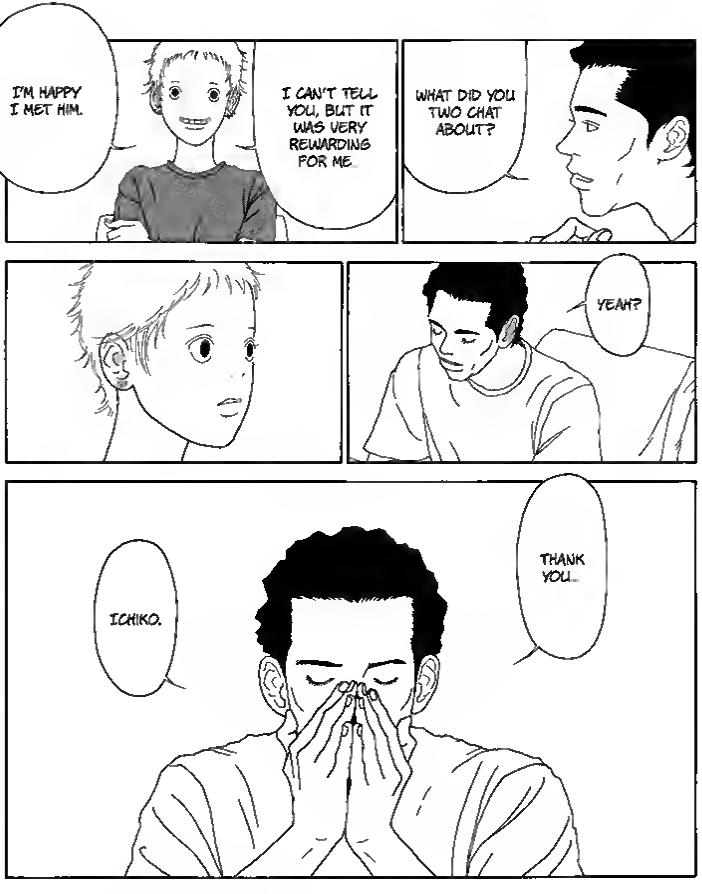

TELL ME, ICHIKO, DON'T YOU AGREE THAT BASICALLY IN LIFE .
IF YOU DIDN'T EXIST, HE PROBABLY NEVER WOULD'VE BEEN ATTRACTED TO YOUR FATHER



Road sign: No Parking!

When I got home, I found Dad preparing curry.

I DON'T THINK QUITE THE SAME WAY SINCE I MET TACHIBANA
HOW SO?
I FIGURED THAT IF YOU NEVER REMARRIED
IT'S LINKED TO THE FACT THAT YOU'RE GAY
Gulp!
Crash
AS A RESULT, I CAN CONSIDER THAT ALL OF YOUR BOYFRIENDS ARE ON MY SIDE
SINCE NONE OF THEM WILL EVER WANT TO TRY TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES AS MY MOTHER

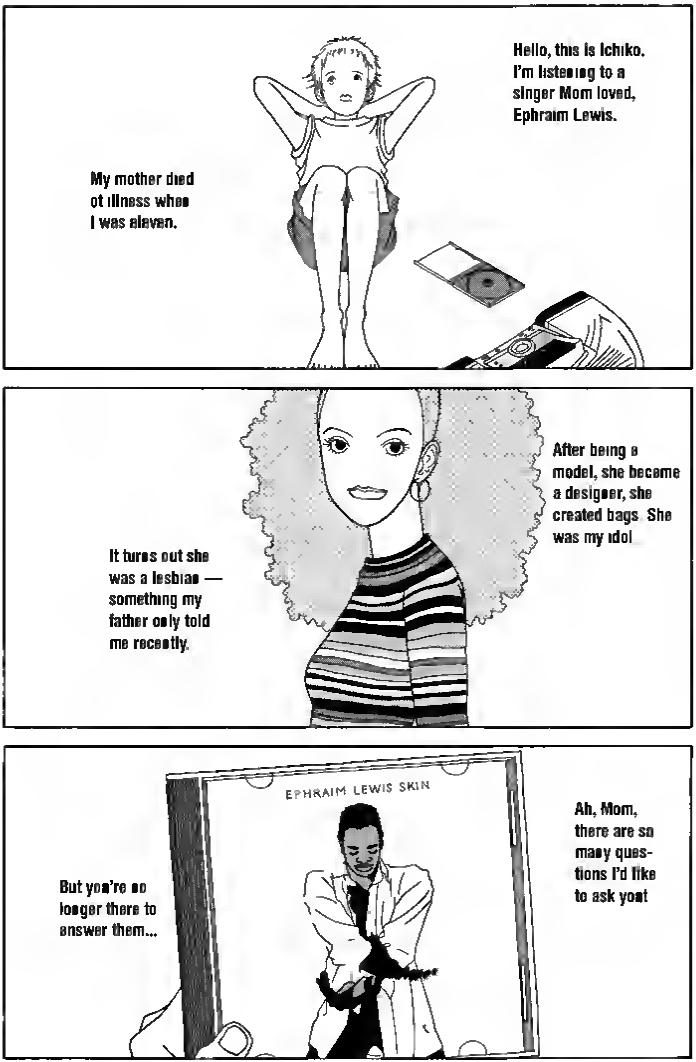


After that we talked about the curry. A very lively conversation, with a slightly forced cheerfulness.

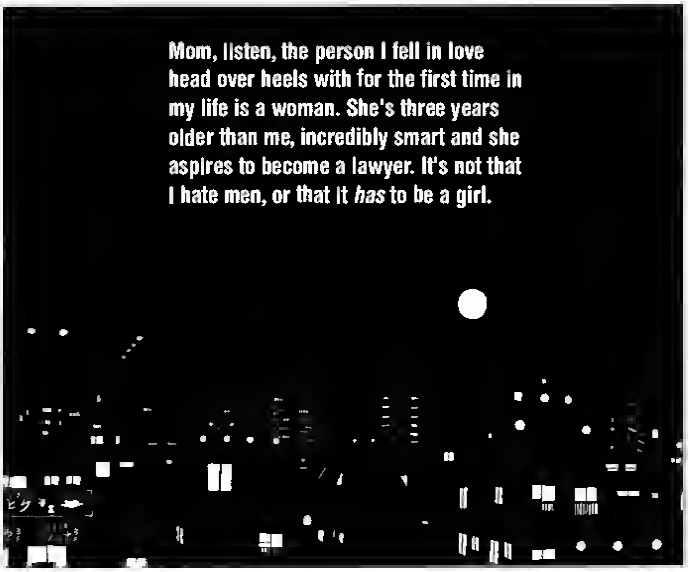
While I gaze at the night sky, I have to think of Tachibana, the man whose world I can't enter. When my father crosses over to that world, he's no longer my father, just a man.

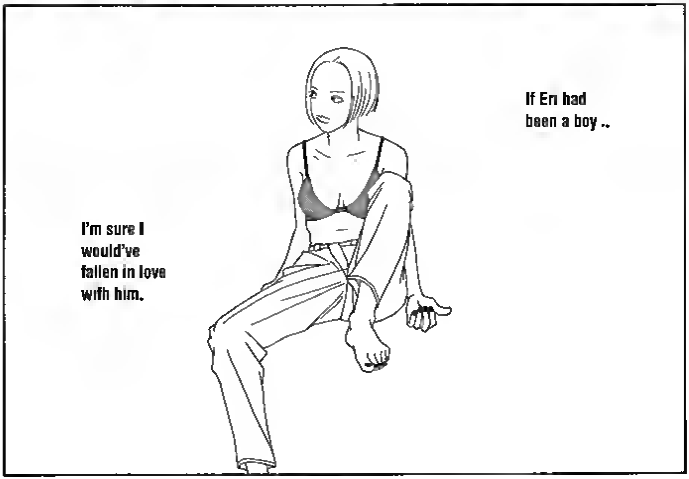
There are many things one should know, but there are also many things that one had better not know.

Chapter 3 - Women

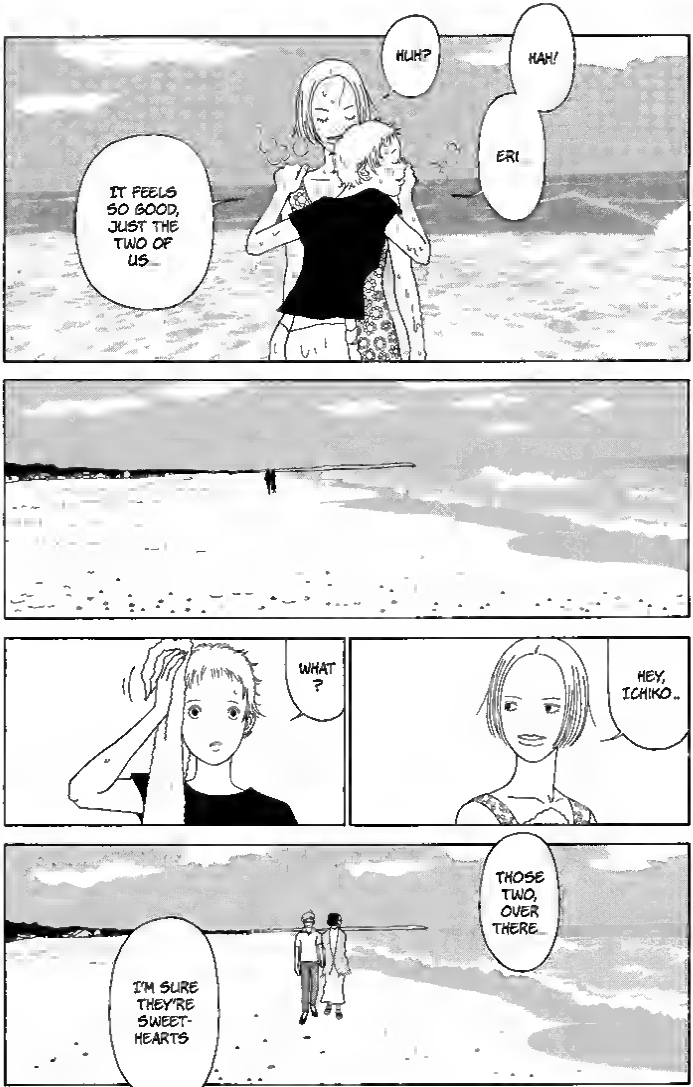

Hello, this is Ichiko. I'm listening to a singer Mom loved, Ephraim Lewis.
My mother died of illness when I was eleven.
After being a model, she became a designer, she created bags. She was my idol.
It turns out she was a lesbian — something my father only told me recently.
EPHRAIM LEWIS SKIN
Ah, Mom, there are so many questions I'd like to ask you!
But you're no longer there to answer them...

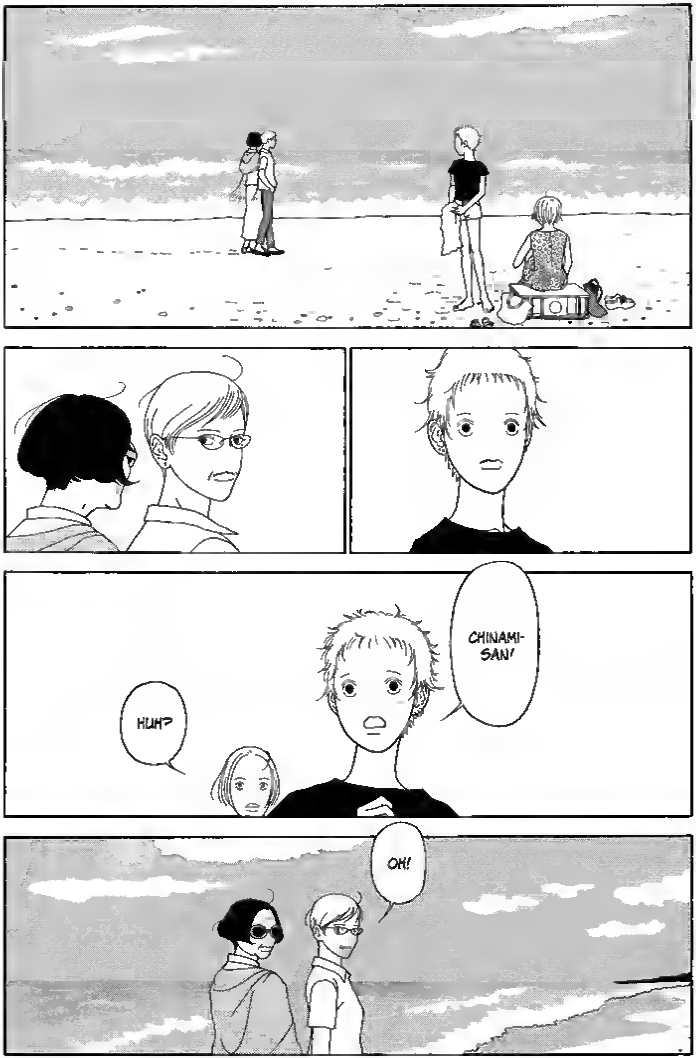
Mom, listen, the person I fell in love head over heels with for the first time in my life is a woman. She's three years older than me, incredibly smart and she aspires to become a lawyer. It's not that I hate men, or that it *has* to be a girl.

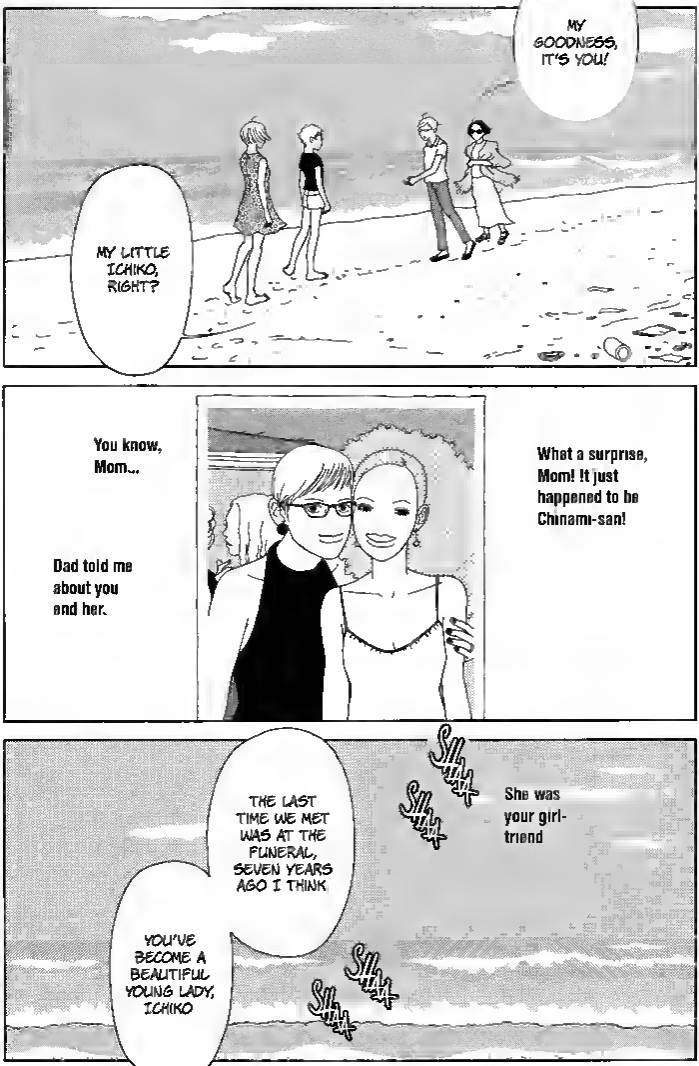


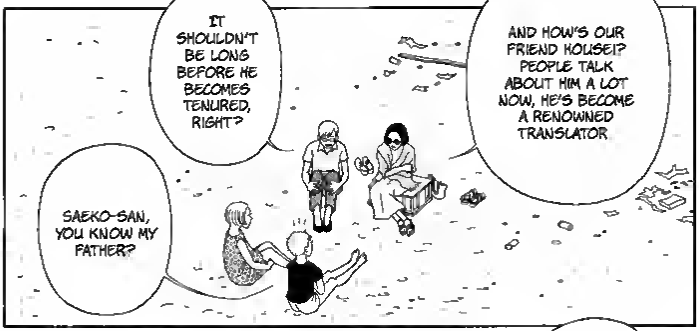


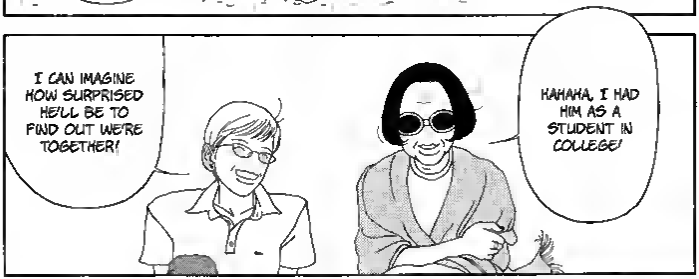
AAAH, IT'S COLD!!
SHIVER
SHIVER
BUT IT FEELS GREAT!
COME ON, ERI, YOU GET WET TOO!
OH NO!
Splash
STOP IT, ICHIKO!
Splash
Splash
Splash
YAAH! ERI, THAT'S ENOUGH, COME ON!
Hah Hah Hah
IT'S YOUR TURN TO GET WET ICHIKO, COME ON!

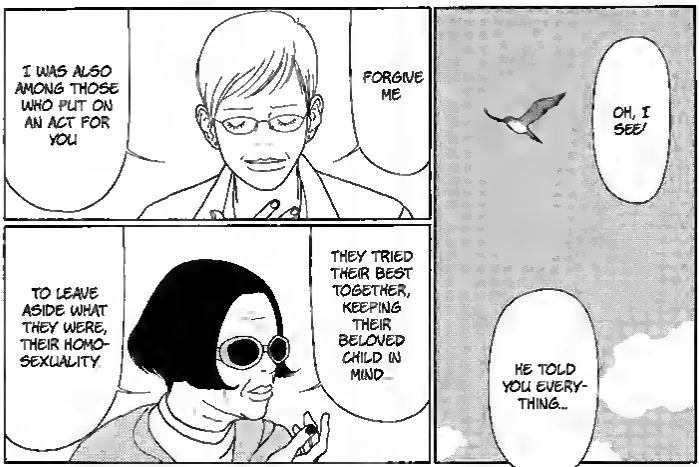

HUH?
HAH!
ERI...
IT FEELS SO GOOD, JUST THE TWO OF US...
WHAT?
HEY, ICHIKO..
THOSE TWO, OVER THERE...
I'M SURE THEY'RE SWEET-HEARTS

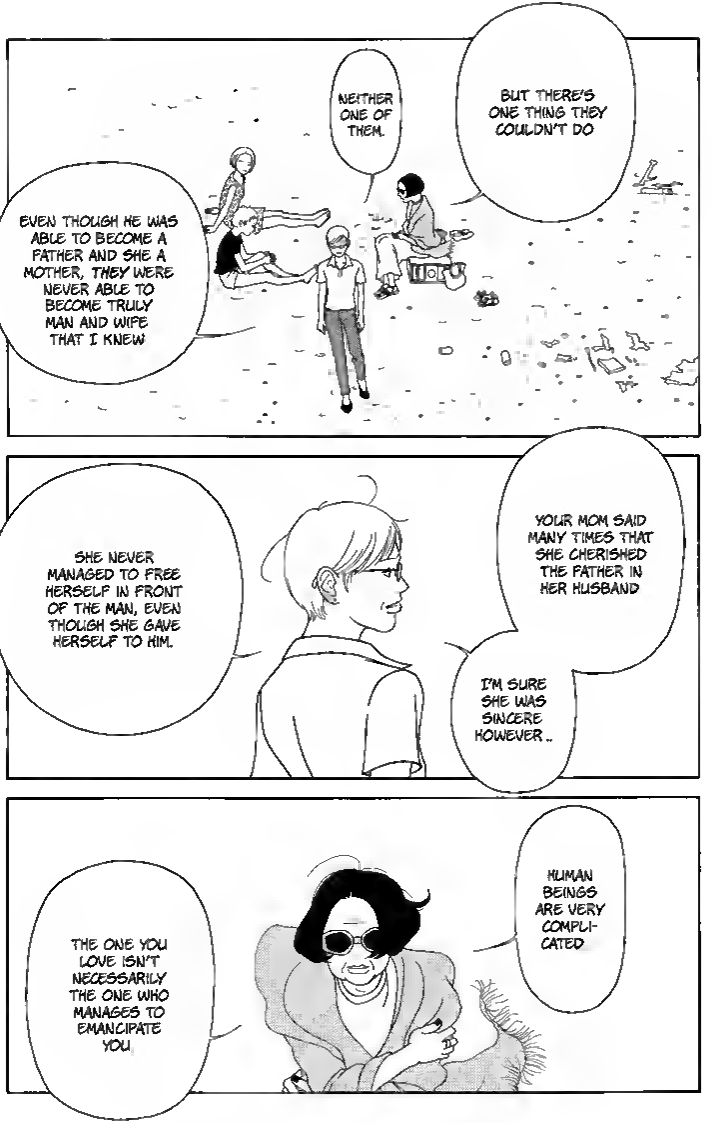

CHINAMI-SAN!
HUH?
OH!

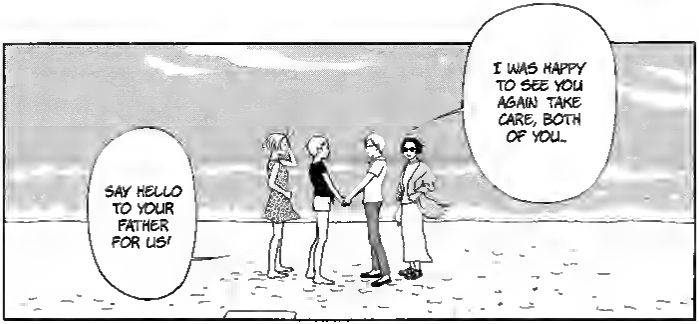

MY GOODNESS, IT'S YOU!
MY LITTLE ICHIKO, RIGHT?
You know, Mom...
Dad told me about you and her.
What a surprise, Mom! It just happened to be Chinami-san!
She was your girl-friend
Sh...
Sh...
THE LAST TIME WE MET WAS AT THE FUNERAL, SEVEN YEARS AGO I THINK
YOU'VE BECOME A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG LADY, ICHIKO
Sh...
Sh...

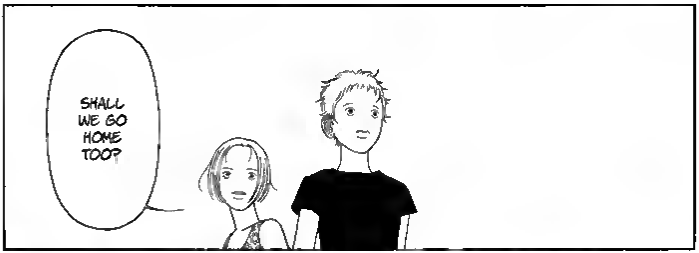

IT SHOULDN'T BE LONG BEFORE HE BECOMES TENURED, RIGHT?
AND HOW'S OUR FRIEND HOUSEI? PEOPLE TALK ABOUT HIM A LOT NOW, HE'S BECOME A RENOWNED TRANSLATOR
SAEKO-SAN, YOU KNOW MY FATHER?

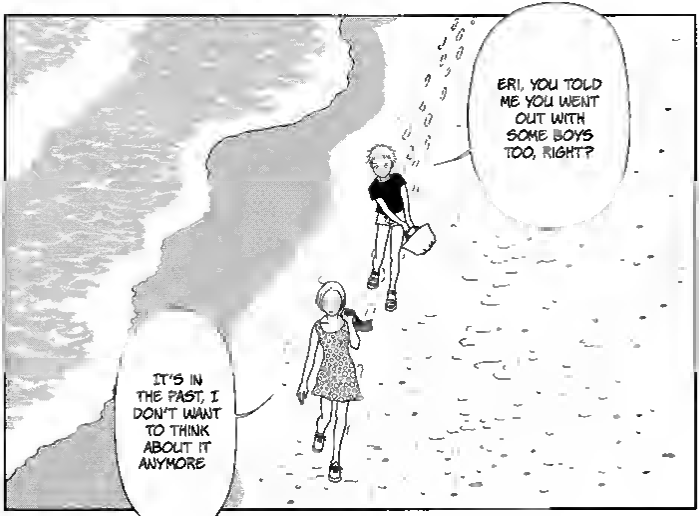

I CAN IMAGINE HOW SURPRISED HE'LL BE TO FIND OUT WE'RE TOGETHER!
KAHAHA, I HAD HIM AS A STUDENT IN COLLEGE!

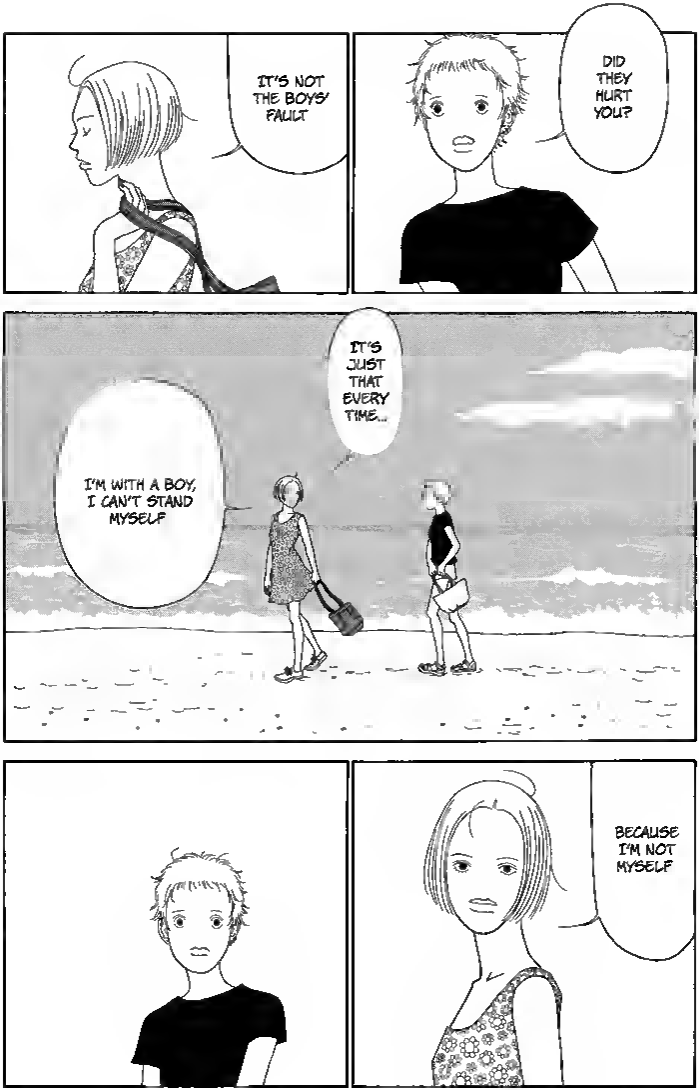

I WAS ALSO AMONG THOSE WHO PUT ON AN ACT FOR YOU
FORGIVE ME
OH, I SEE!
TO LEAVE ASIDE WHAT THEY WERE, THEIR HOMO-SEXUALITY
THEY TRIED THEIR BEST TOGETHER, KEEPING THEIR BELOVED CHILD IN MIND...
HE TOLD YOU EVERY-THING...

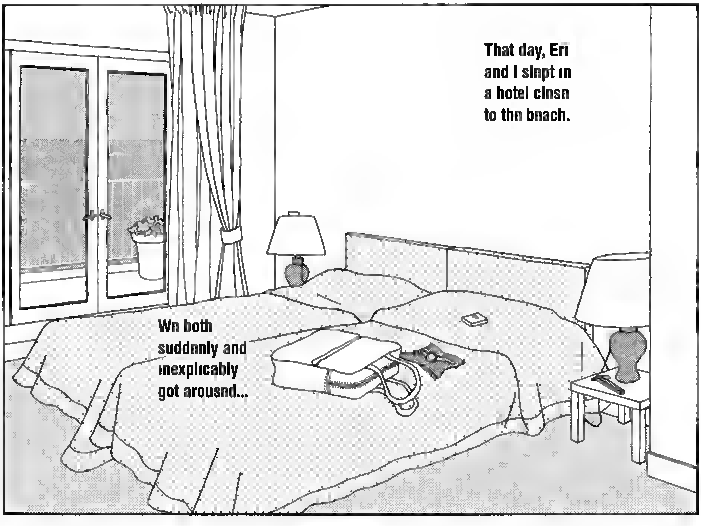

EVEN THOUGH HE WAS ABLE TO BECOME A FATHER AND SHE A MOTHER, THEY WERE NEVER ABLE TO BECOME TRULY MAN AND WIFE THAT I KNEW
NEITHER ONE OF THEM.
BUT THERE'S ONE THING THEY COULDN'T DO
SHE NEVER MANAGED TO FREE HERSELF IN FRONT OF THE MAN, EVEN THOUGH SHE GAVE HERSELF TO HIM.
YOUR MOM SAID MANY TIMES THAT SHE CHERISHED THE FATHER IN HER HUSBAND
I'M SURE SHE WAS SINCERE HOWEVER..
THE ONE YOU LOVE ISN'T NECESSARILY THE ONE WHO MANAGES TO EMANCIPATE YOU.
HUMAN BEINGS ARE VERY COMPLI-CATED

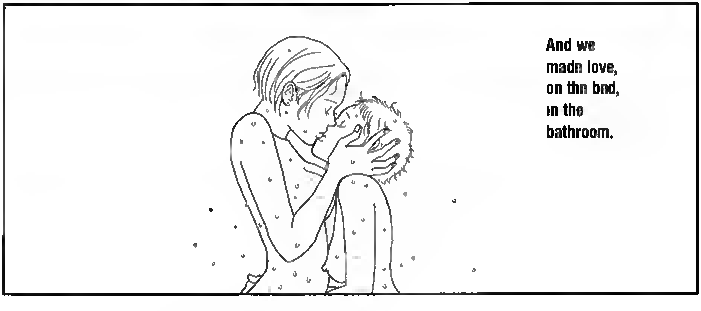

I WAS HAPPY TO SEE YOU AGAIN TAKE CARE, BOTH OF YOU.
SAY HELLO TO YOUR FATHER FOR US!


SHALL WE GO HOME TOO?


ER!, YOU TOLD ME YOU WENT OUT WITH SOME BOYS TOO, RIGHT?
IT'S IN THE PAST, I DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT IT ANYMORE


IT'S NOT THE BOYS' FAULT
DID THEY HURT YOU?
IT'S JUST THAT EVERY TIME...
I'M WITH A BOY, I CAN'T STAND MYSELF
BECAUSE I'M NOT MYSELF

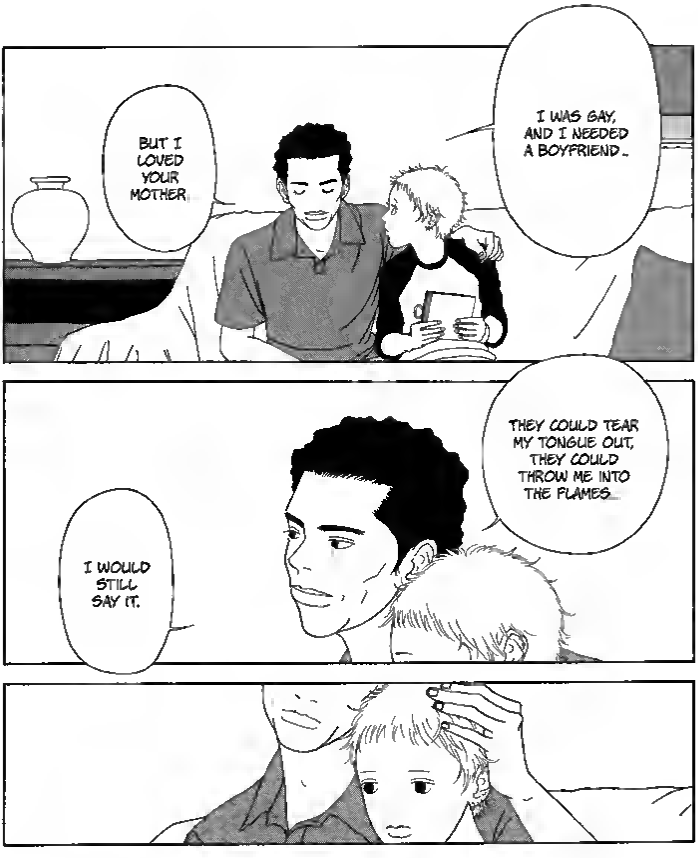




The next evening, when I got home I found Dad listening to Ephraim Lewis.

INCREDIBLE! CHINAMI AND SAEKO...
ARE LIVING TOGETHER!
WOW, I'M SPEECH-LESS!
PSHTT
SO, TELL ME..
HOW WAS YOUR FIRST TRIP WITH ERI?
IT WAS AWESOME !
FABU-LOUS!
DAD, DID YOU TAKE THIS CD FROM MY ROOM?
WHAT? YOU WERE THE ONE WHO HAD IT?!
I LOOKED FOR IT AND SINCE I COULDN'T FIND IT, I BOUGHT IT, YESTERDAY..

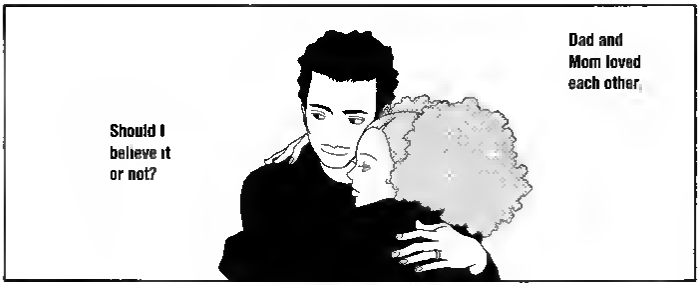
DREAM?
I HAD THAT FAMILIAR DREAM AGAIN, YOU KNOW
I want to hug her delicate shoulders against me, but I am holding back .
I see your mother's back as she's sewing a little dress for you ..
Every time.
OF COURSE I DID!
DID YOU LOVE MOM?

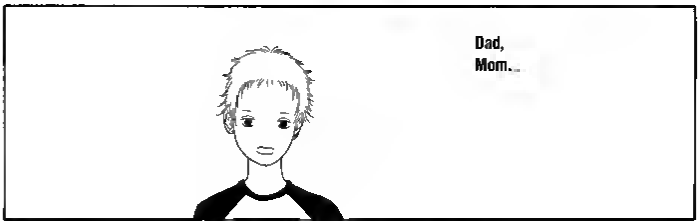

BUT I LOVED YOUR MOTHER.
I WAS GAY, AND I NEEDED A BOYFRIEND..
I WOULD STILL SAY IT.
THEY COULD TEAR MY TONGUE OUT, THEY COULD THROW ME INTO THE FLAMES.

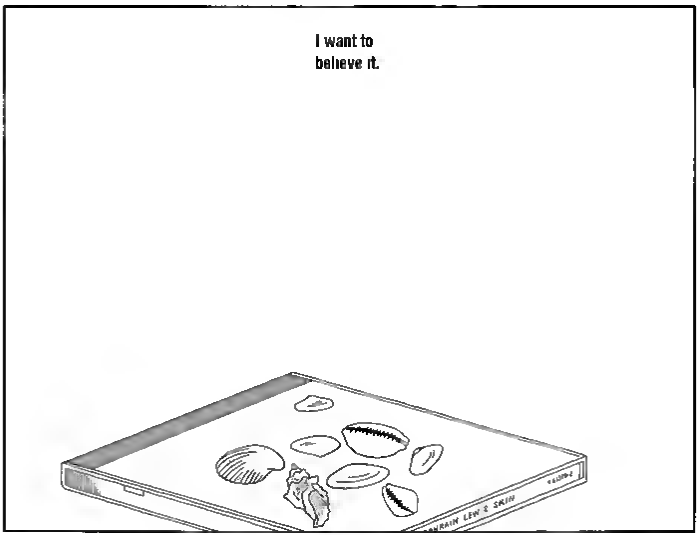
to believe in things or not.

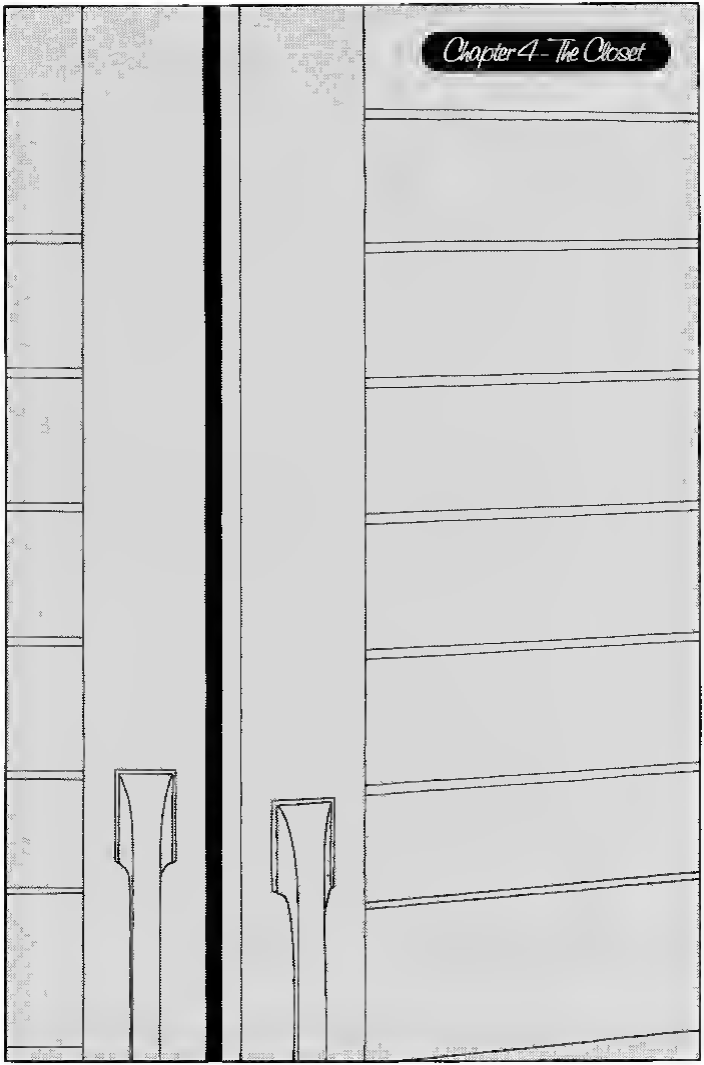
So the question is just...

I don't know what's true and what's not.


Dad and
Mom loved
each other.
Should I
believe it
or not?


Dad,
Mom...


I want to
believe it.

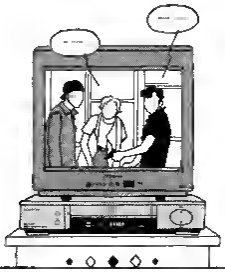

Chapter 4 - The Closet

Hello, this is Ichiko. Remember me?

By the way, for a little while now, I've been aware that I'm a lesbian!

Before, I used to attribute to fate the fact that the object of my love, Eri, was a girl. But in reality, it's something quite different.

It's true: she cannot be a boy, and if she were one, it wouldn't be my Eri.



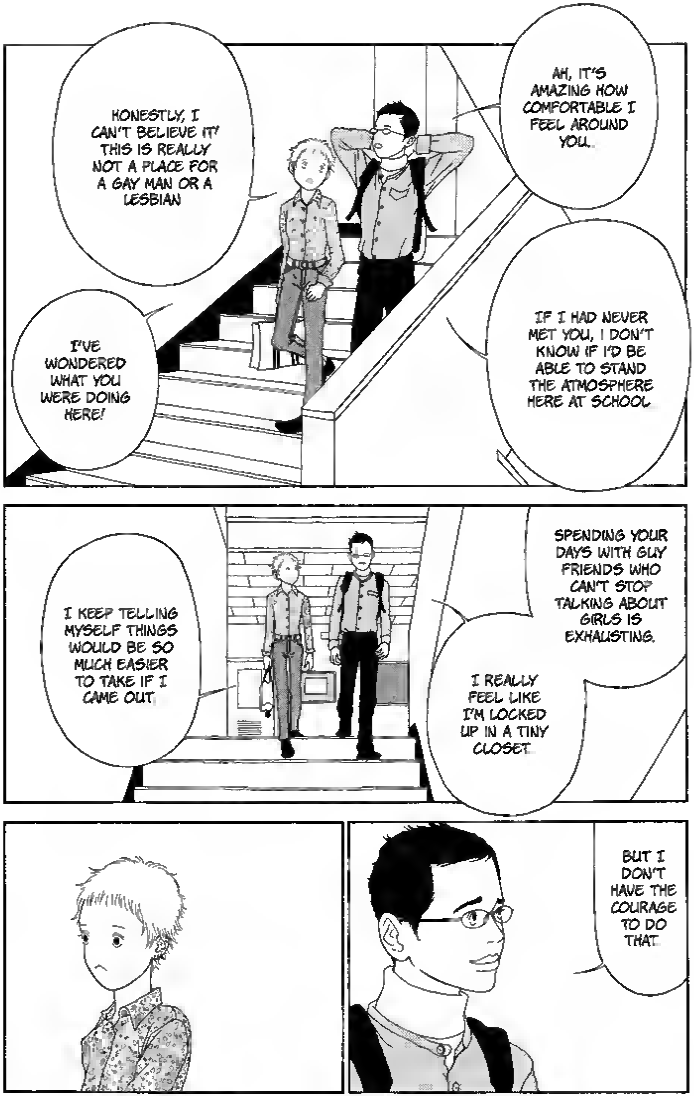
Since I love her deeply, and all the things that she does to me make me feel good, making love to a girl has become the most natural thing in the world to me

But it's really difficult to make everyone around me understand that. For the moment, only Dad, Eri and Take-chan* —a friend from school—know.

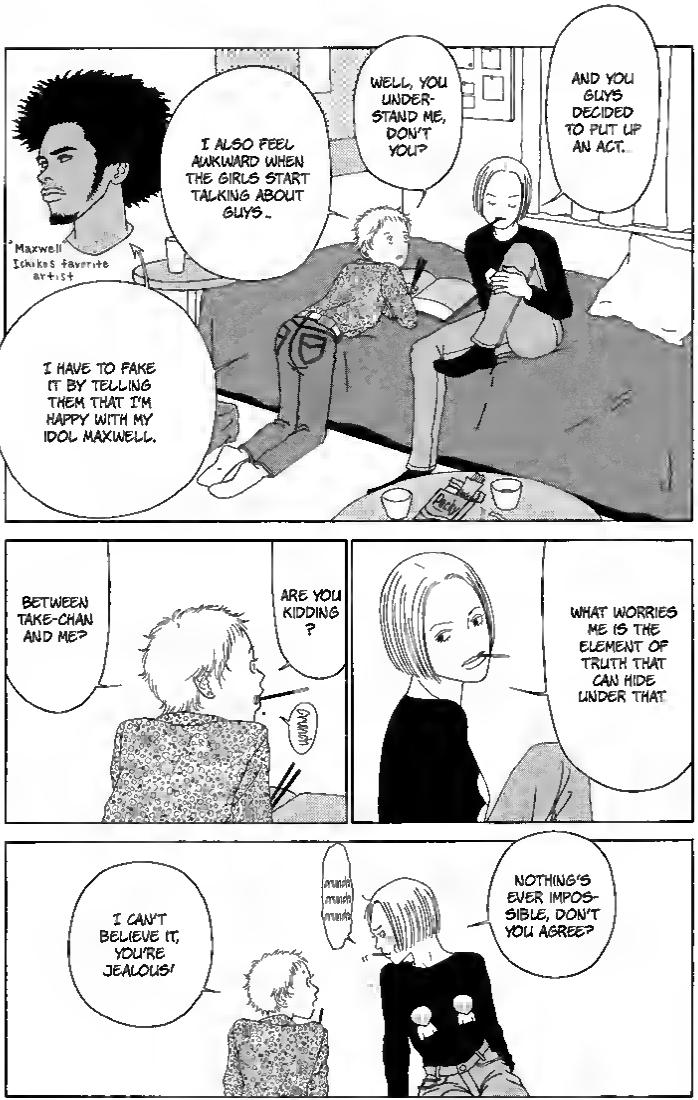
*-chan: affectionate name suffix in Japan

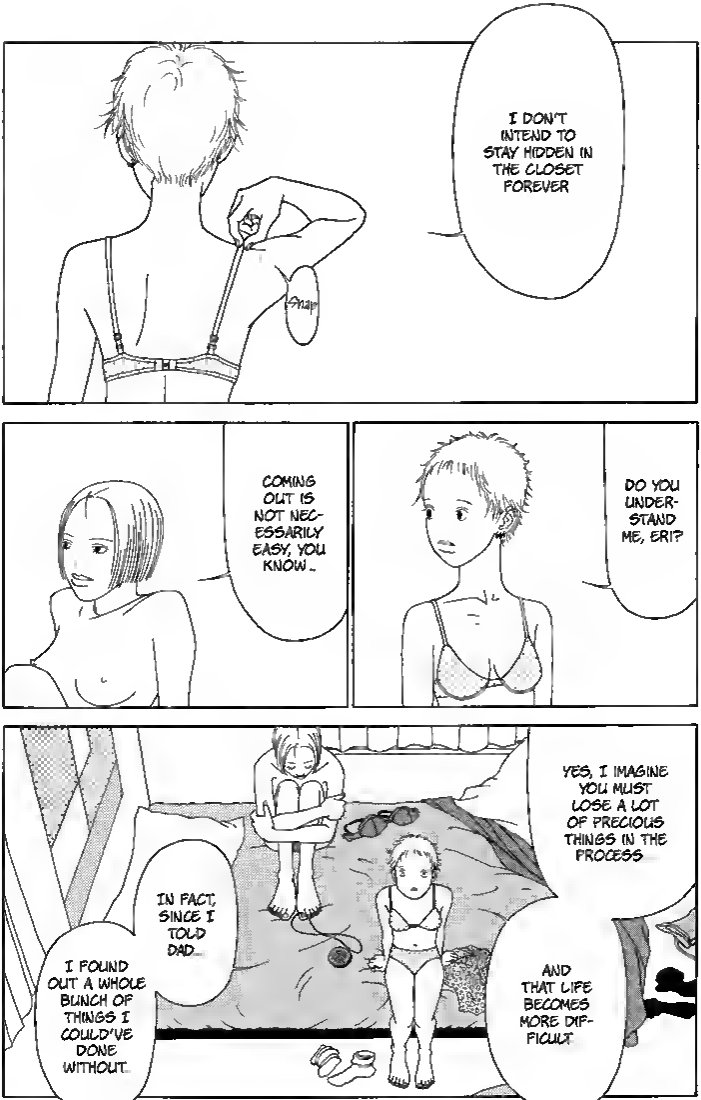
He finished college, he's four years older than me. Just like me, he dreams of being a translator. One other thing:

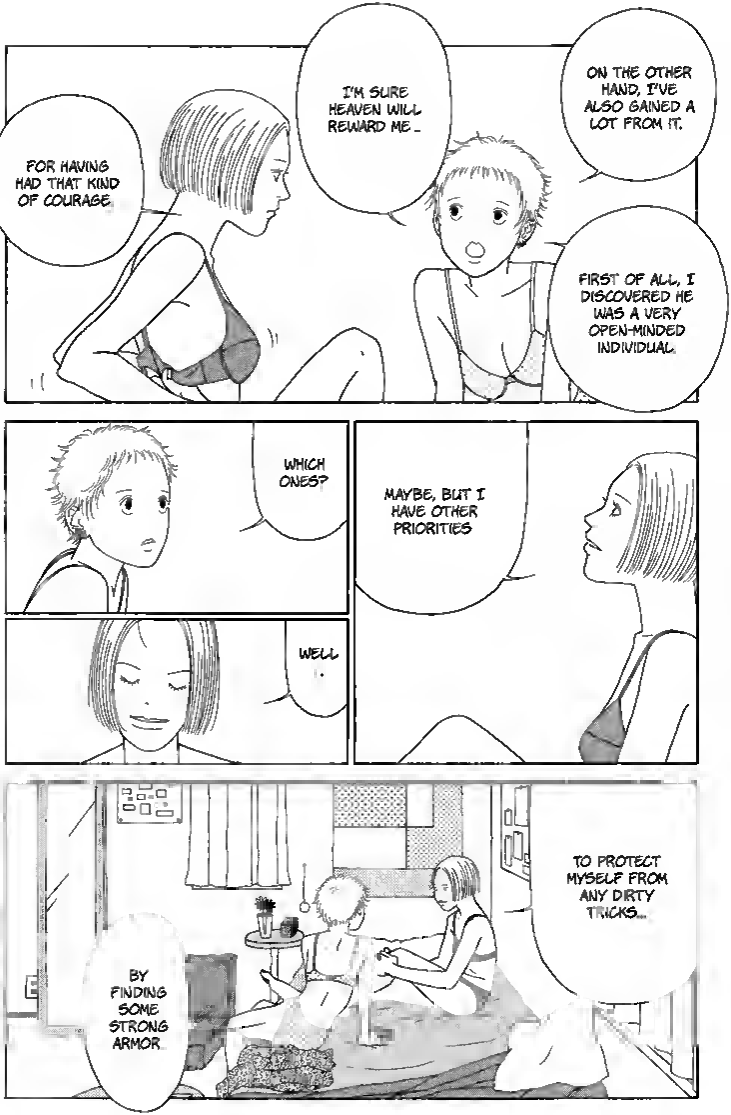
He's gay!!!


HONESTLY, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! THIS IS REALLY NOT A PLACE FOR A GAY MAN OR A LESBIAN
I'VE WONDERED WHAT YOU WERE DOING HERE!
AH, IT'S AMAZING HOW COMFORTABLE I FEEL AROUND YOU.
IF I HAD NEVER MET YOU, I DON'T KNOW IF I'D BE ABLE TO STAND THE ATMOSPHERE HERE AT SCHOOL.
I KEEP TELLING MYSELF THINGS WOULD BE SO MUCH EASIER TO TAKE IF I CAME OUT.
I REALLY FEEL LIKE I'M LOCKED UP IN A TINY CLOSET.
SPENDING YOUR DAYS WITH GUY FRIENDS WHO CAN'T STOP TALKING ABOUT GIRLS IS EXHAUSTING.
BUT I DON'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO DO THAT.

HEY, DID YOU HEAR?
EVERYONE IN CLASS SEEMS TO THINK WE'RE GOING OUT TOGETHER...
YES, THEY SOMETIMES ASK ME ABOUT IT..
AND I ANSWER NO WITHOUT HESITATING
HUH?
LOOK
WHAT IF YOU JUST PRETEND WE ARE?
IF IT WOULD MAKE YOUR LIFE A LITTLE EASIER, I HAVE NO PROBLEMS WITH IT!
IT COULD HURT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM, BUT IF YOU TELL THEM YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND..
THE BOYS WILL EVENTUALLY ACCEPT IT, WON'T THEY?


AND YOU GUYS DECIDED TO PUT UP AN ACT.
WELL, YOU UNDER-STAND ME, DON'T YOU?
I ALSO FEEL AWKWARD WHEN THE GIRLS START TALKING ABOUT GUYS.
*Maxwell Ichika's favorite artist
I HAVE TO FAKE IT BY TELLING THEM THAT I'M HAPPY WITH MY IDOL MAXWELL.
WHAT WORRIES ME IS THE ELEMENT OF TRUTH THAT CAN HIDE UNDER THAT.
ARE YOU KIDDING?
AHAHA!
BETWEEN TAKE-CHAN AND ME?
NOTHING'S EVER IMPOS-SIBLE, DON'T YOU AGREE?
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT, YOU'RE JEALOUS!


I DON'T INTEND TO STAY HIDDEN IN THE CLOSET FOREVER
Snap
COMING OUT IS NOT NECESSARILY EASY, YOU KNOW...
DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, ERI?
YES, I IMAGINE YOU MUST LOSE A LOT OF PRECIOUS THINGS IN THE PROCESS
IN FACT, SINCE I TOLD DAD...
I FOUND OUT A WHOLE BUNCH OF THINGS I COULD'VE DONE WITHOUT.
AND THAT LIFE BECOMES MORE DIFFICULT

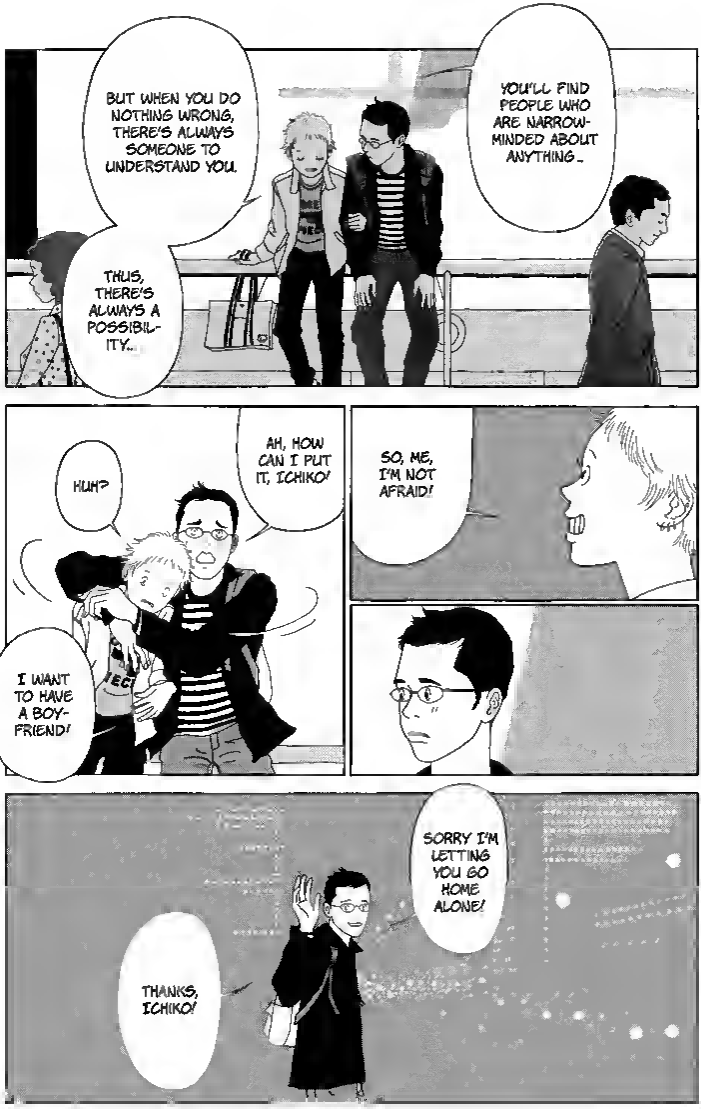

FOR HAVING HAD THAT KIND OF COURAGE
I'M SURE HEAVEN WILL REWARD ME...
ON THE OTHER HAND, I'VE ALSO GAINED A LOT FROM IT.
FIRST OF ALL, I DISCOVERED HE WAS A VERY OPEN-MINDED INDIVIDUAL.
WHICH ONES?
WELL...
MAYBE, BUT I HAVE OTHER PRIORITIES
BY FINDING SOME STRONG ARMOR
TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM ANY DIRTY TRICKS...

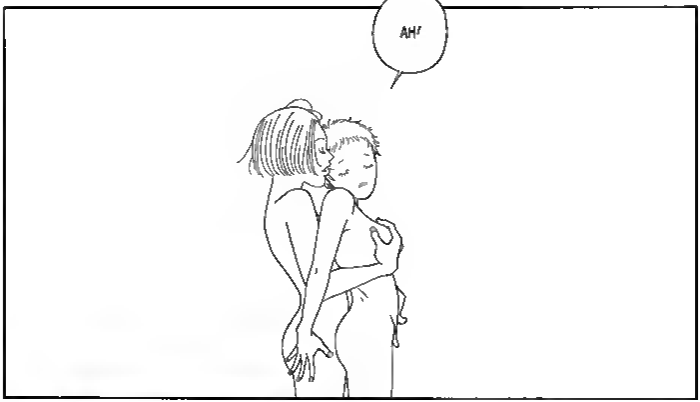
CANDY
THANKS TO YOU, I HAVE A LOT LESS TO WORRY ABOUT THESE DAYS
OH YEAH? WELL FOR ME IT'S DIFFERENT WHENEVER I SAY IT, I ALWAYS GET THE SAME ANSWER. I KNEW IT!
ALTHOUGH MY CONSCIENCE IS TROUBLING ME...
WHY WORRY IN ADVANCE, AFTER ALL?
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I'VE GROWN TO LIKE UP TO NOW
AH, YOU'RE A GREAT CHICK, YOU KNOW!
HUH?
BY THE WAY, TAKE-CHAN, WE HADN'T HAD DINNER TOGETHER FOR AGES!

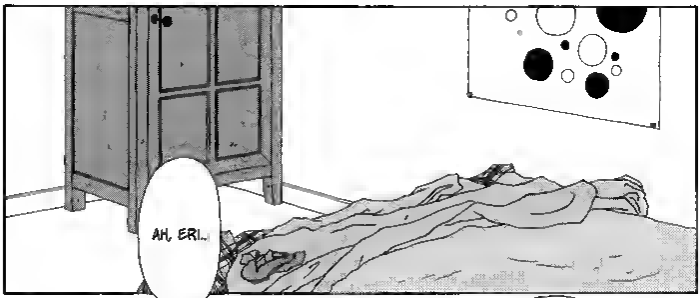
WOULDN'T YOU BE TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF, BY ANY CHANCE?
NO WONDER, YOU ALWAYS HAVE A DATE!
BY THE WAY, YOU KNOW THIS HAYASHI GUY, IN CLASS. WELL, BELIEVE ME, LOOK OUT FOR HIM, REALLY
OH YEAH? WHAT DID HE DO?
NO, YOU THINK?
WELL, I KIND OF KNEW IT! HE HAS NO INTEREST IN CHICKS
HE'S A FAG.
I HAPPENED TO BE SITTING BEHIND HIM THE OTHER DAY WHEN HE TOOK HIS BOOK OUT, I SAW A WEIRD THING IN HIS BAG
A MAGAZINE, AND THERE WAS A BUCK NAKED GUY ON THE COVER!

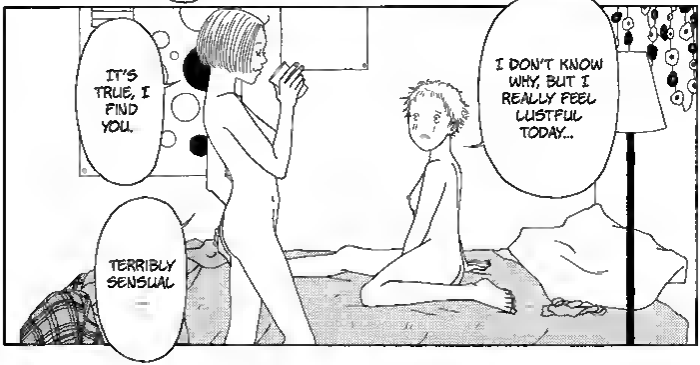
I WONDER IF THEY REALIZE WHAT THEY'RE DOING...
NO WAY! HIM, GAY, NO KIDDING? YUK, ONE OF THOSE PERVERTS!
THESE GUYS, I JUST DON'T GET THEM, SO
NAAH, IT'S OBVIOUS! THAT'S EXACTLY WHY, THEY'RE PERVERTS, I'M TELLING YOU!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE, TAKE-CHAN, I'M DONE TOO
TAKE-CHAN!!
YOU WANT TO TELL THEM NOT TO DRESS UP AS GUYS!?
WOULD YOU RATHER THEY COME IN SKIRTS? HAHAHA!
TAKE-CHAN!

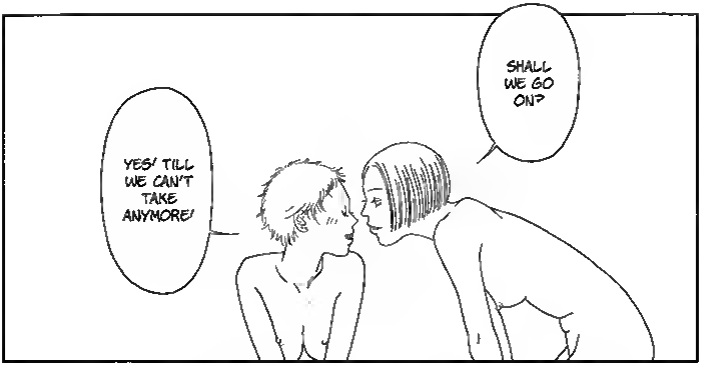
THE TRASH YOU HEAR!
BUT THAT'S WHAT THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE THINK OF US
THAT EXPLAINS WHY WE'RE ALWAYS EDGY, HIDING WHAT WE ARE..
IT'S SAD TO SAY BUT THE LITTLE WE JUST HEARD WAS ENOUGH TO CHILL ME
BUT AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, IT'S THE SAME
THEY WEREN'T TALKING ABOUT ME...
HAVING TO TREMBLE ALL THE TIME ISN'T LIVING
AH!
TAKE-CHAN!
OUR ONLY CRIME IS TO LOVE SOMEONE.
ALL WE DO IS LOVE ONE ANOTHER


BUT WHEN YOU DO NOTHING WRONG, THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE TO UNDERSTAND YOU.
THUS, THERE'S ALWAYS A POSSIBILITY..
YOU'LL FIND PEOPLE WHO ARE NARROW-MINDED ABOUT ANYTHING..
HUH?
AH, HOW CAN I PUT IT, ICHIKO!
I WANT TO HAVE A BOYFRIEND!
SO, ME, I'M NOT AFRAID!
SORRY I'M LETTING YOU GO HOME ALONE!
THANKS, ICHIKO!


AH!


AH, ERI..

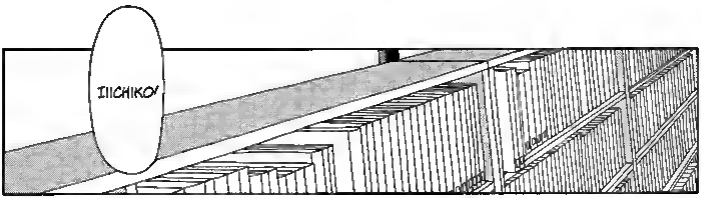

IT'S TRUE, I FIND YOU.
I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT I REALLY FEEL LUSTFUL TODAY..
TERRIBLY SENSUAL

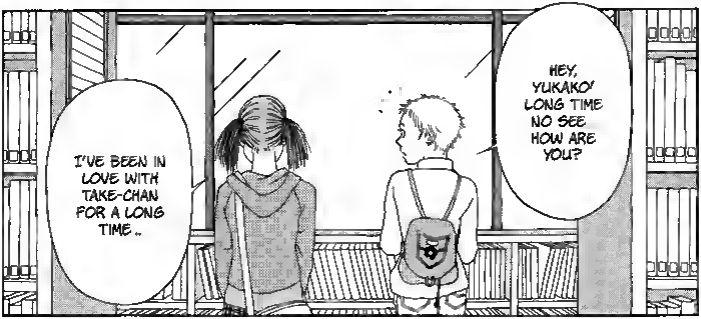


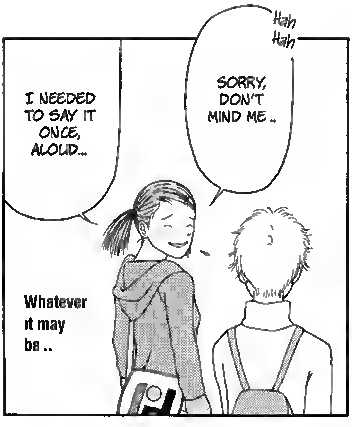
I thought I heard a voice whispering to me: "Keep going."

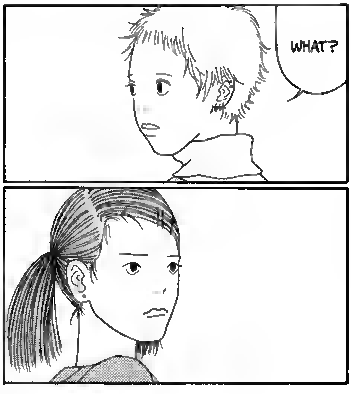
The two of us alone, even in a cramped space... made me feel fulfilled, safe...

With Eri next to me, nothing else seemed to matter...









Ah . But in any case, it's too late.

What about the ones you invoke to protect yourself?

Is a lie a misdead?

For a while, I was afraid to run into her.

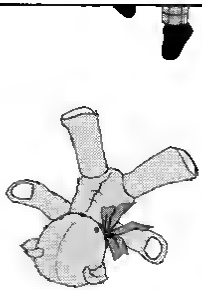
PATRICK
Chapter 5 - Eri

Hello, this is Ichiko. Recently, I've been wondering how long I've been a lesbian

Basically, I have no memory of ever loving any men other than Dad and my favorite musicians. It's true, women are the ones who I've always been attracted to.

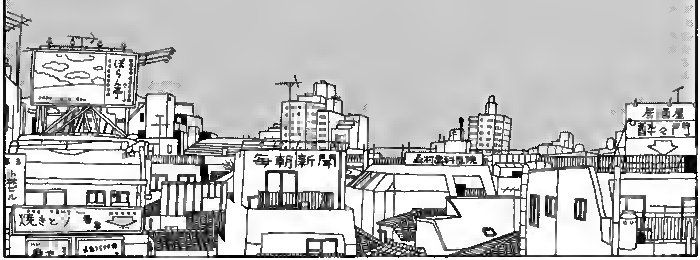
But for a long time I thought: "That's not love." Since my eleventh birthday and Mom's death, I've put it down to my lack of maternal affection.

And my attraction to women to my immaturity.



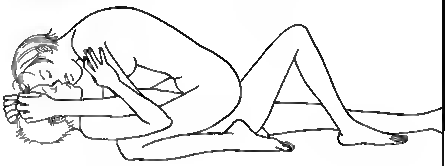
But meeting Eri changed everything. What I look for in her is a lover, and I'm clearly aware of that. Nothing to do therefore with Mom. Eri's not a surrogate mother.

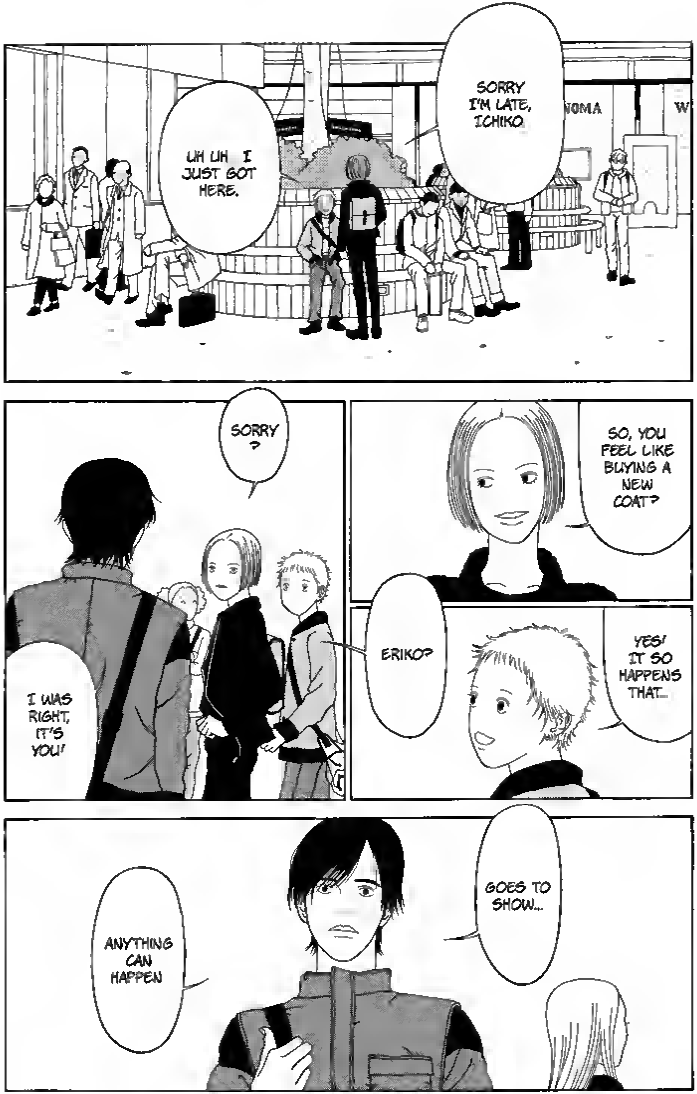
Eri almost never talks about the time when she was the other Eri. And I don't ask her. Her real name is Eriko, and she became Eri when she met Nana, an American woman. I don't know much more.



I love the way she makes love to me. At first, I couldn't get over it.

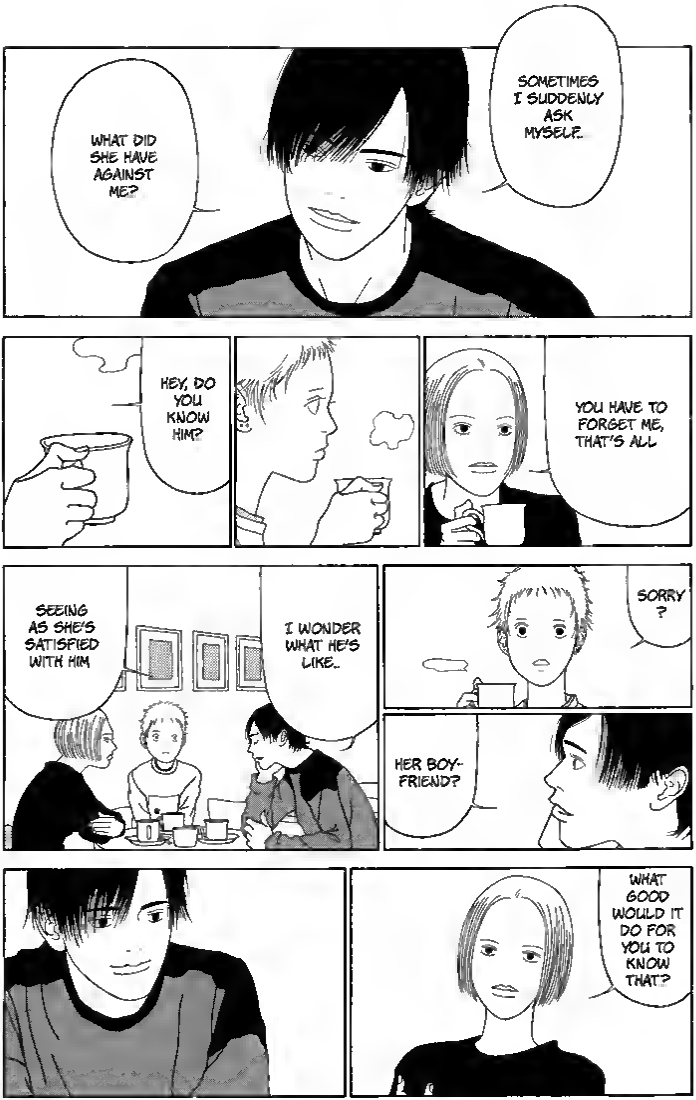
And so she explained to me: "Nana taught me all of this."

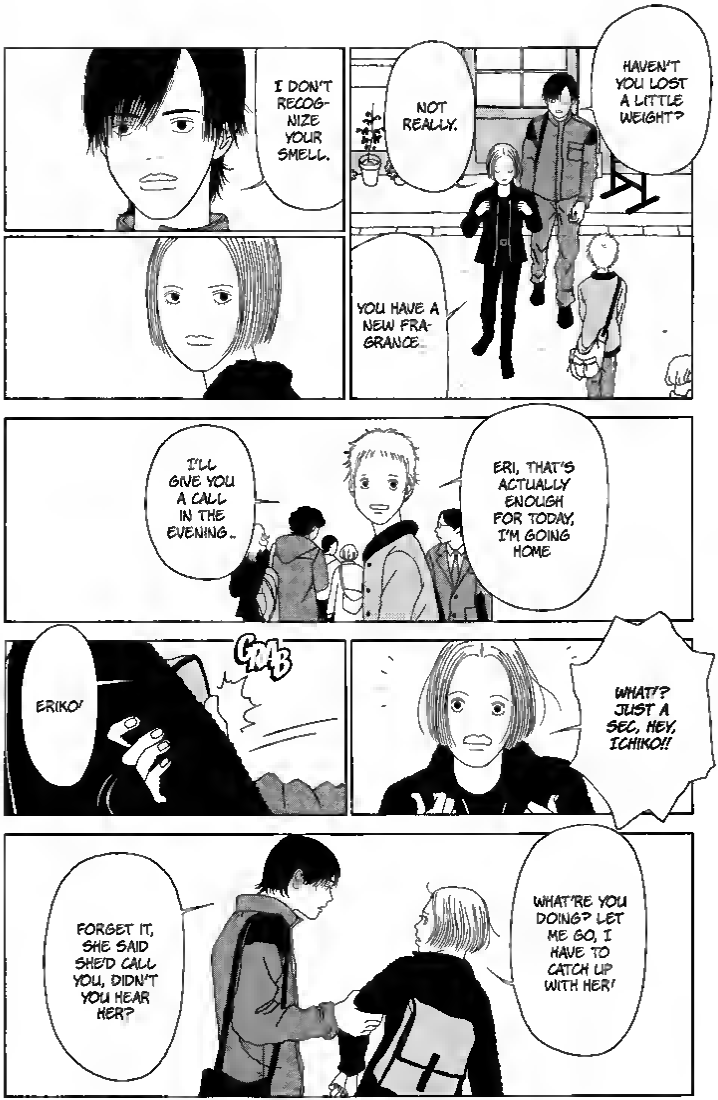


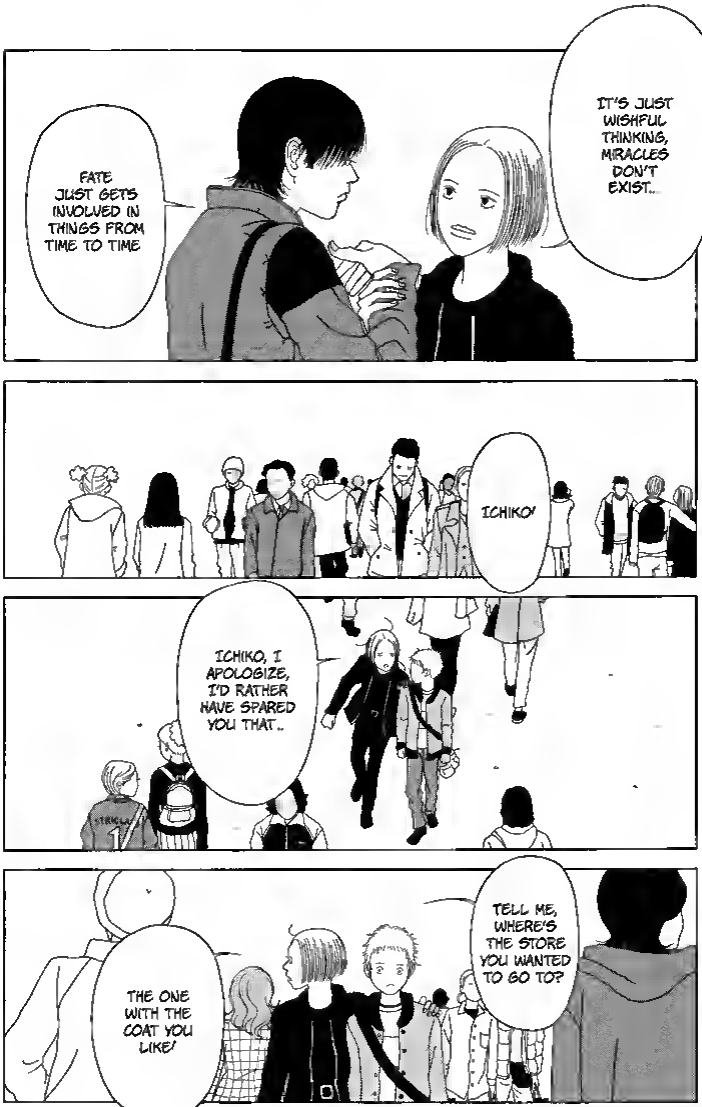

SORRY I'M LATE, ICHIKO.
UH UH I JUST GOT HERE.
SORRY ?
I WAS RIGHT, IT'S YOU!
SO, YOU FEEL LIKE BUYING A NEW COAT?
ERIKO?
YES! IT SO HAPPENS THAT...
GOES TO SHOW...
ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN

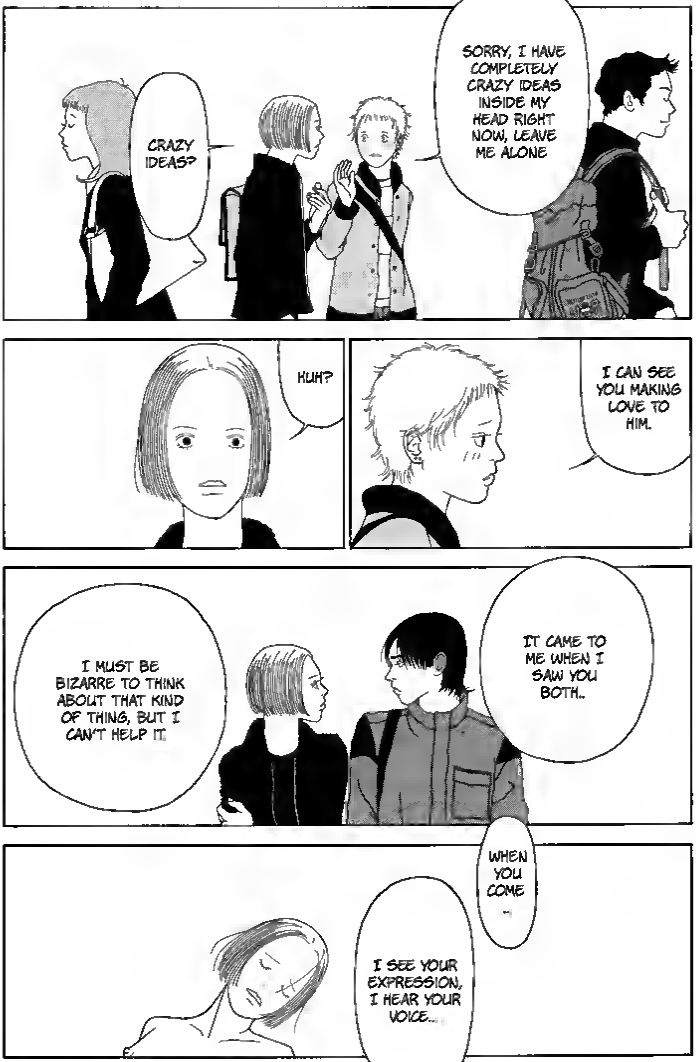
HEY, ARE YOU BUSY? CAN YOU CHAT FOR A WHILE?
I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO
WHAT ABOUT?
HOW'S IT GOING?
IT'S GOING.
OH, I APOLOGIZE.. THIS MIGHT SOUND IMPORTUNATE BUT, COULD YOU GIVE US A FEW MINUTES, IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE WE SAW EACH OTHER..
SORRY, BUT I'M WITH A FRIEND, SHE HAS SOME SHOPPING TO DO.
WELL NO, IMAGINE THE COIN-CIDENCE!
IT'S A REAL MIRACLE
BUT HOW ABOUT YOU, ERI?
PERSON-ALLY, I DON'T MIND...
YOU DON'T SEEM LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE ME ALONE, HUH?

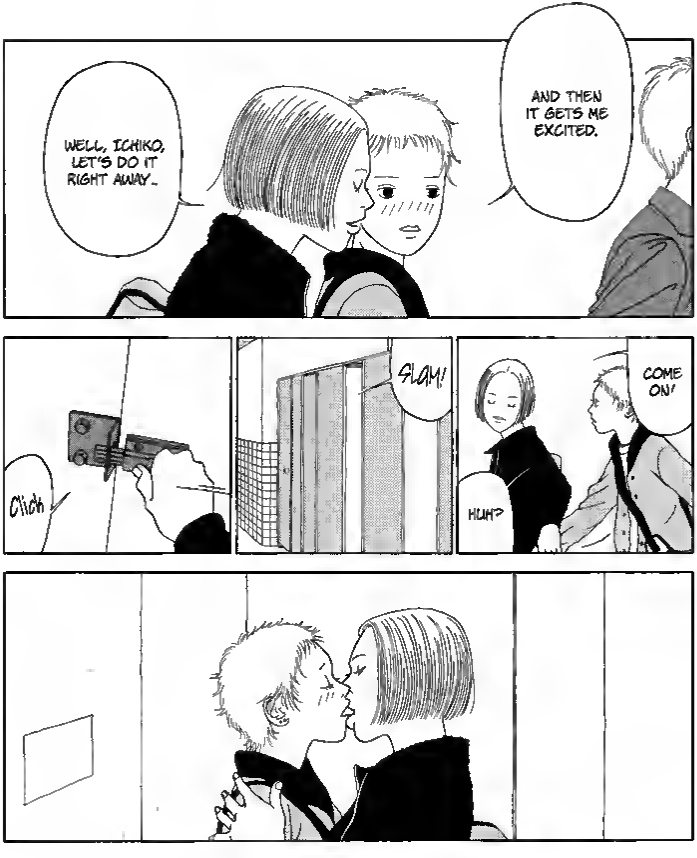
YOU MOVED RIGHT AFTER, HUH? YOU'RE IN COLLEGE?
STILL PLANNING TO TAKE THE BAR EXAM?
YES
YES..
YOU WITH SOME-ONE?
OF COURSE
OH.?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, OH ?
IT'S THE SAME FOR YOU, I ASSUME?
NO..
ME?
AFTERWARDS, I HAD ALL THE GIRLS I COULD GET BUT IT NEVER LASTED
PROB-ABLY..
BE-CAUSE OF YOU
CAN YOU BE MORE PRECISE?
I STILL HAVEN'T COME TO TERMS WITH IT.
I DON'T UNDER-STAND WHY YOU DUMPED ME.


SOMETIMES I SUDDENLY ASK MYSELF..
WHAT DID SHE HAVE AGAINST ME?
HEY, DO YOU KNOW HIM?
YOU HAVE TO FORGET ME, THAT'S ALL
SEEING AS SHE'S SATISFIED WITH HIM
I WONDER WHAT HE'S LIKE..
SORRY ?
HER BOY-FRIEND?
WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO FOR YOU TO KNOW THAT?


I DON'T RECOGNIZE YOUR SMELL.
NOT REALLY.
HAVEN'T YOU LOST A LITTLE WEIGHT?
YOU HAVE A NEW FRAGRANCE.
I'LL GIVE YOU A CALL IN THE EVENING..
ERI, THAT'S ACTUALLY ENOUGH FOR TODAY, I'M GOING HOME
GRAB
ERIKO!
WHAT!? JUST A SEC, HEY, ICHIKO!!
FORGET IT, SHE SAID SHE'D CALL YOU, DIDN'T YOU HEAR HER?
WHAT'RE YOU DOING? LET ME GO, I HAVE TO CATCH UP WITH HER!


IT'S JUST WISHFUL THINKING, MIRACLES DON'T EXIST...
FATE JUST GETS INVOLVED IN THINGS FROM TIME TO TIME
ICHIKO!
ICHIKO, I APOLOGIZE, I'D RATHER HAVE SPARED YOU THAT..
TELL ME, WHERE'S THE STORE YOU WANTED TO GO TO?
THE ONE WITH THE COAT YOU LIKE!

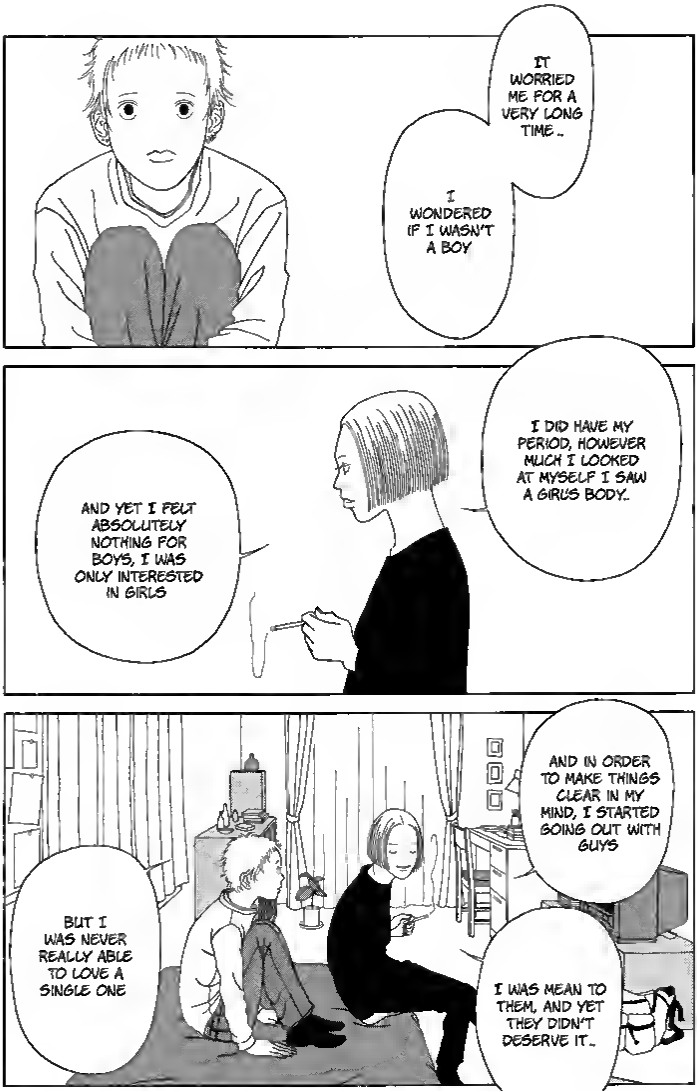

SORRY, I HAVE COMPLETELY CRAZY IDEAS INSIDE MY HEAD RIGHT NOW, LEAVE ME ALONE
CRAZY IDEAS?
KUH?
I CAN SEE YOU MAKING LOVE TO HIM.
I MUST BE BIZARRE TO THINK ABOUT THAT KIND OF THING, BUT I CAN'T HELP IT.
IT CAME TO ME WHEN I SAW YOU BOTH..
WHEN YOU COME ...
I SEE YOUR EXPRESSION, I HEAR YOUR VOICE...

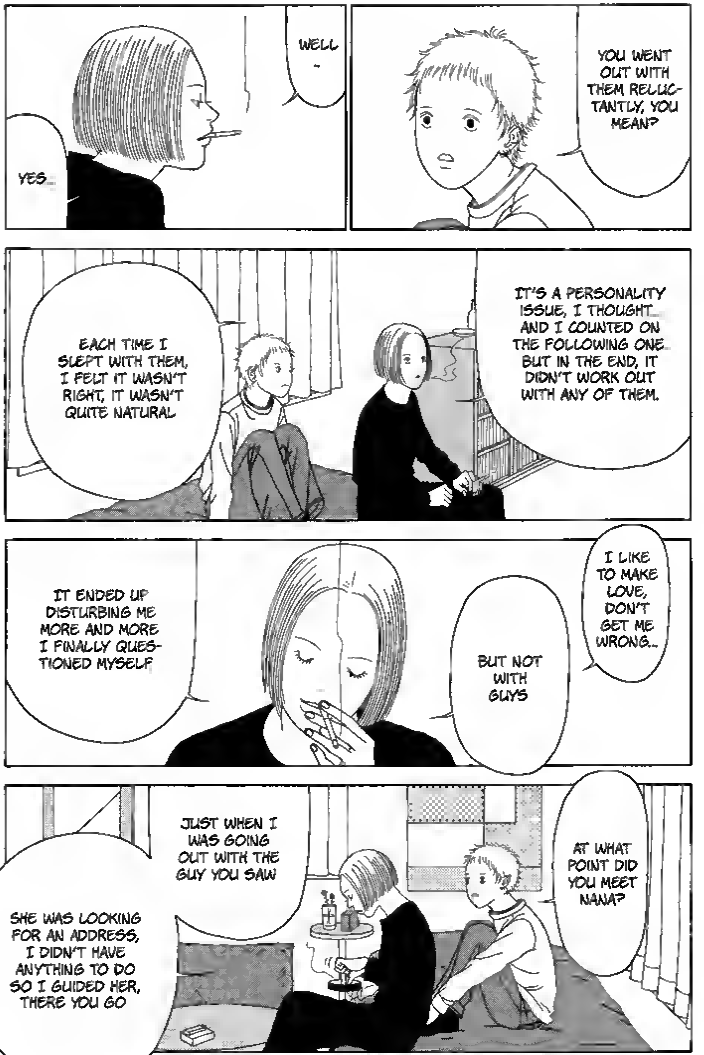


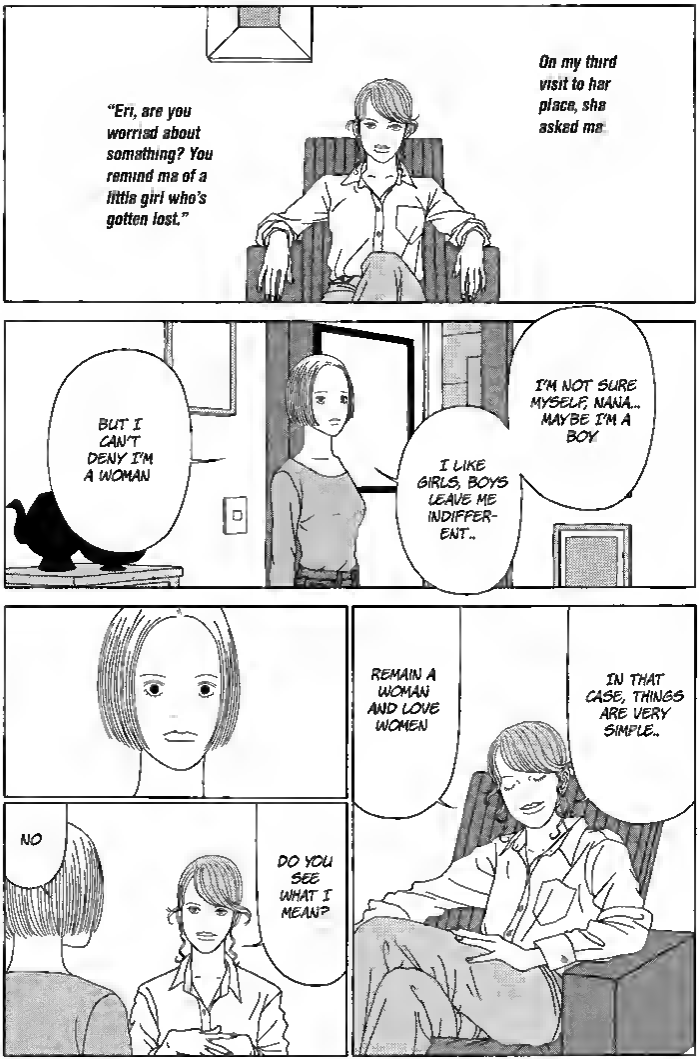
Maybe that coat I wanted had already been sold.

Afterwards, we went straight to Eri's.

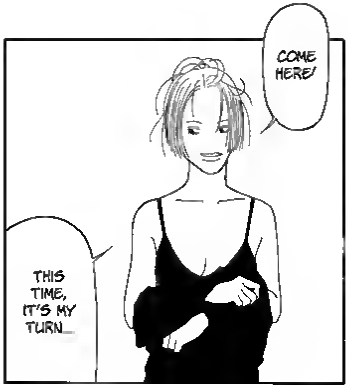
It took me just a moment to come.

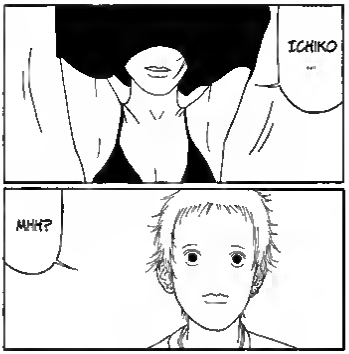

IT WORRIED ME FOR A VERY LONG TIME..
I WONDERED IF I WASN'T A BOY
I DID HAVE MY PERIOD, HOWEVER MUCH I LOOKED AT MYSELF I SAW A GIRLS BODY..
AND YET I FELT ABSOLUTELY NOTHING FOR BOYS, I WAS ONLY INTERESTED IN GIRLS
AND IN ORDER TO MAKE THINGS CLEAR IN MY MIND, I STARTED GOING OUT WITH GUYS
BUT I WAS NEVER REALLY ABLE TO LOVE A SINGLE ONE
I WAS MEAN TO THEM, AND YET THEY DIDN'T DESERVE IT..


WELL -
YES...
YOU WENT OUT WITH THEM RELUCTANTLY, YOU MEAN?
EACH TIME I SLEPT WITH THEM, I FELT IT WASN'T RIGHT, IT WASN'T QUITE NATURAL
IT'S A PERSONALITY ISSUE, I THOUGHT... AND I COUNTED ON THE FOLLOWING ONE. BUT IN THE END, IT DIDN'T WORK OUT WITH ANY OF THEM.
IT ENDED UP DISTURBING ME MORE AND MORE I FINALLY QUESTIONED MYSELF
BUT NOT WITH GUYS
I LIKE TO MAKE LOVE, DON'T GET ME WRONG...
JUST WHEN I WAS GOING OUT WITH THE GUY YOU SAW
SHE WAS LOOKING FOR AN ADDRESS, I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO SO I GUIDED HER, THERE YOU GO
AT WHAT POINT DID YOU MEET NANA?


"Eri, are you worried about something? You remind me of a little girl who's gotten lost."
On my third visit to her place, she asked me:
BUT I CAN'T DENY I'M A WOMAN
I LIKE GIRLS, BOYS LEAVE ME INDIFFERENT..
I'M NOT SURE MYSELF, NANA... MAYBE I'M A BOY
NO
DO YOU SEE WHAT I MEAN?
REMAIN A WOMAN AND LOVE WOMEN
IN THAT CASE, THINGS ARE VERY SIMPLE..

CAN YOU CONFIDE IN ME COMPLETELY?
YES, NANA.
SHE'S FREEDOM TURNED WOMAN, SHE LIVES AS SHE SEES FIT.
SHE CAN LOVE MEN AS MUCH AS WOMEN.
WAS SHE A LESBIAN?
I DON'T THINK SO
"Everyone necessarily carries an element of mystery."
"Eri, no hasty conclusions, the human being is too complicated..."





But, Eri...

Anything can happen, even tomorrow is unpredictable

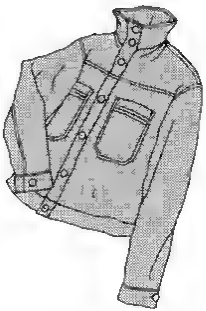
I imagine that when she was my age, Mom never would've thought she'd marry Dad

Three days later, the coat had been sold, but I came across a jacket I liked even more.

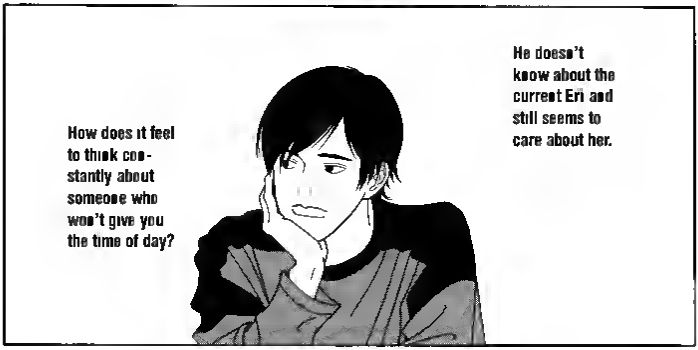
I'd like your caresses to last indefinitely...

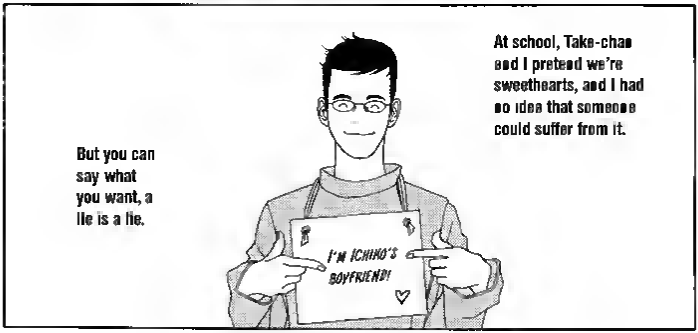
on my body...

on my heart.

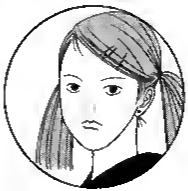


Hello, this is Ichiko. Since I met Eri's ex...
I can't stop telling myself that loving someone also has its difficult side.


He doesn't know about the current Eri and still seems to care about her.
How does it feel to think constantly about someone who won't give you the time of day?

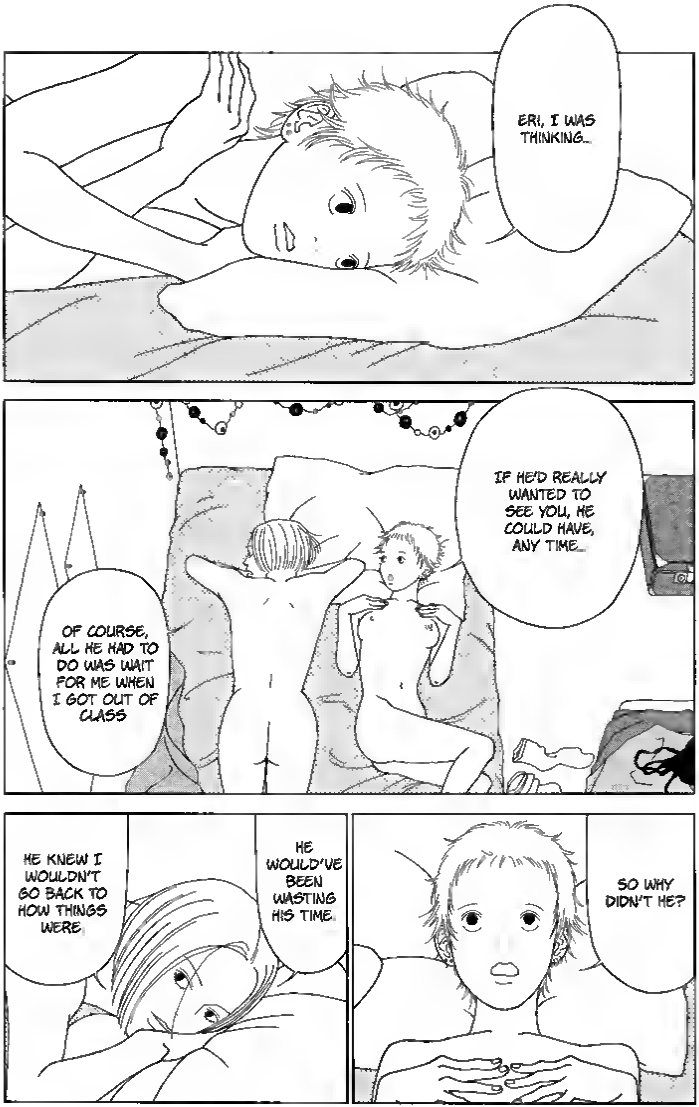

At school, Take-chan and I pretend we're sweethearts, and I had no idea that someone could suffer from it.
But you can say what you want, a lie is a lie.
I'M ICHIKO'S BOYFRIEND!

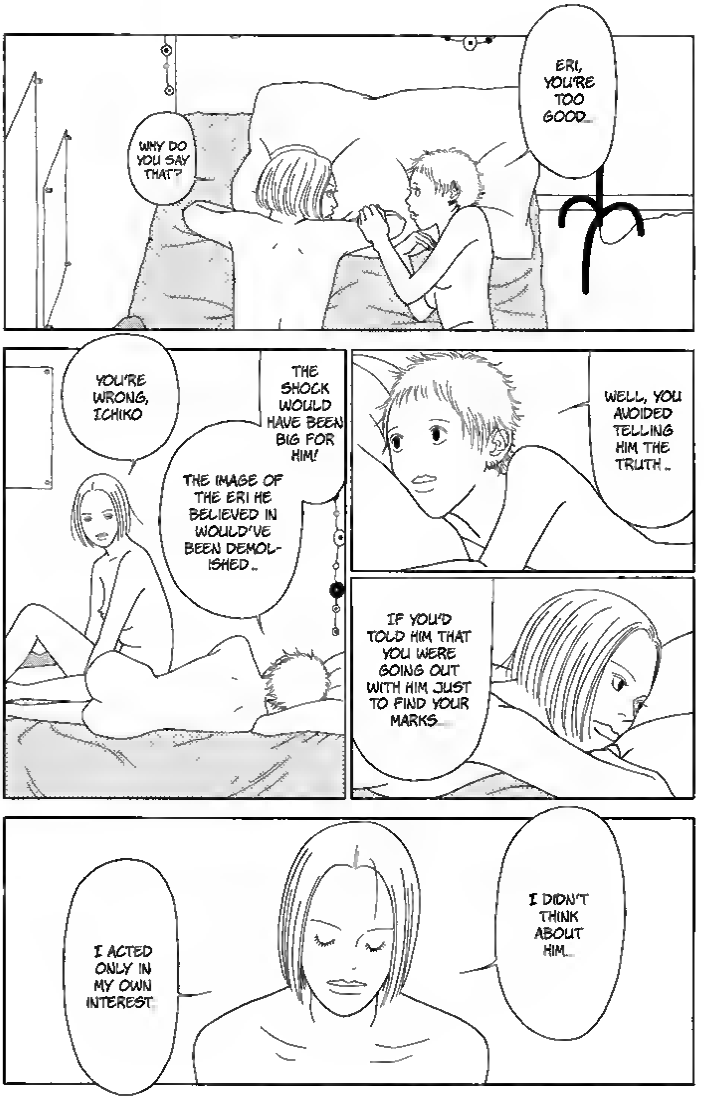
Yukako still scares me. She can resent any other partner of Take-chan's... but since I'm nothing more than a screen, I'm only losing in this.



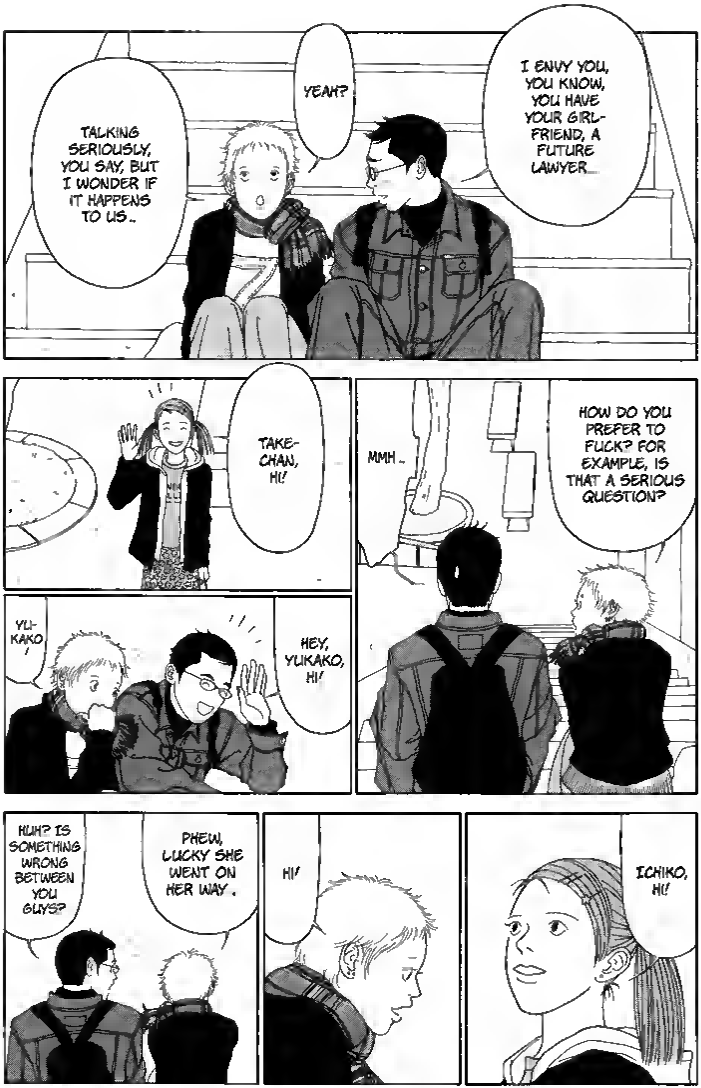
If I'd known how she felt, I wouldn't have accepted this role.

Even knowing that for her, it would have been a hopeless love.

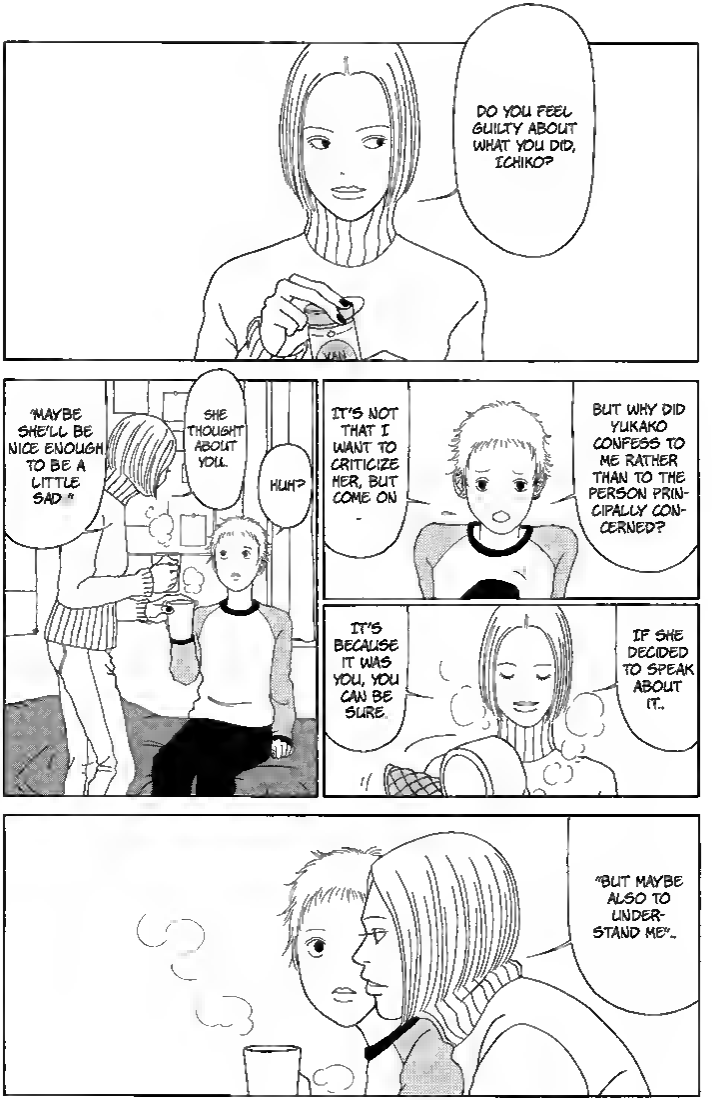

ERI, I WAS THINKING...
IF HE'D REALLY WANTED TO SEE YOU, HE COULD HAVE, ANY TIME...
OF COURSE, ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS WAIT FOR ME WHEN I GOT OUT OF CLASS
HE KNEW I WOULDN'T GO BACK TO HOW THINGS WERE.
HE WOULD'VE BEEN WASTING HIS TIME.
SO WHY DIDN'T HE?

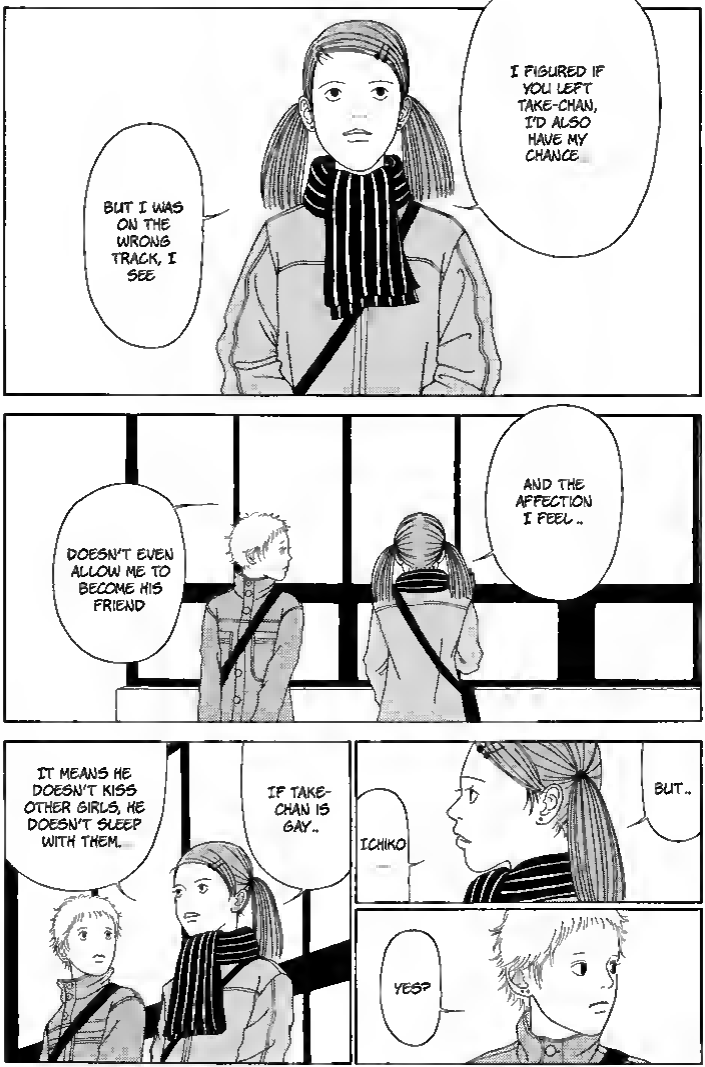

ERI, YOU'RE TOO GOOD...
WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?
WELL, YOU AVOIDED TELLING HIM THE TRUTH...
YOU'RE WRONG, ICHIKO
THE SHOCK WOULD HAVE BEEN BIG FOR HIM!
THE IMAGE OF THE ERI HE BELIEVED IN WOULD'VE BEEN DEMOLISHED...
IF YOU'D TOLD HIM THAT YOU WERE GOING OUT WITH HIM JUST TO FIND YOUR MARKS...
I DIDN'T THINK ABOUT HIM...
I ACTED ONLY IN MY OWN INTEREST

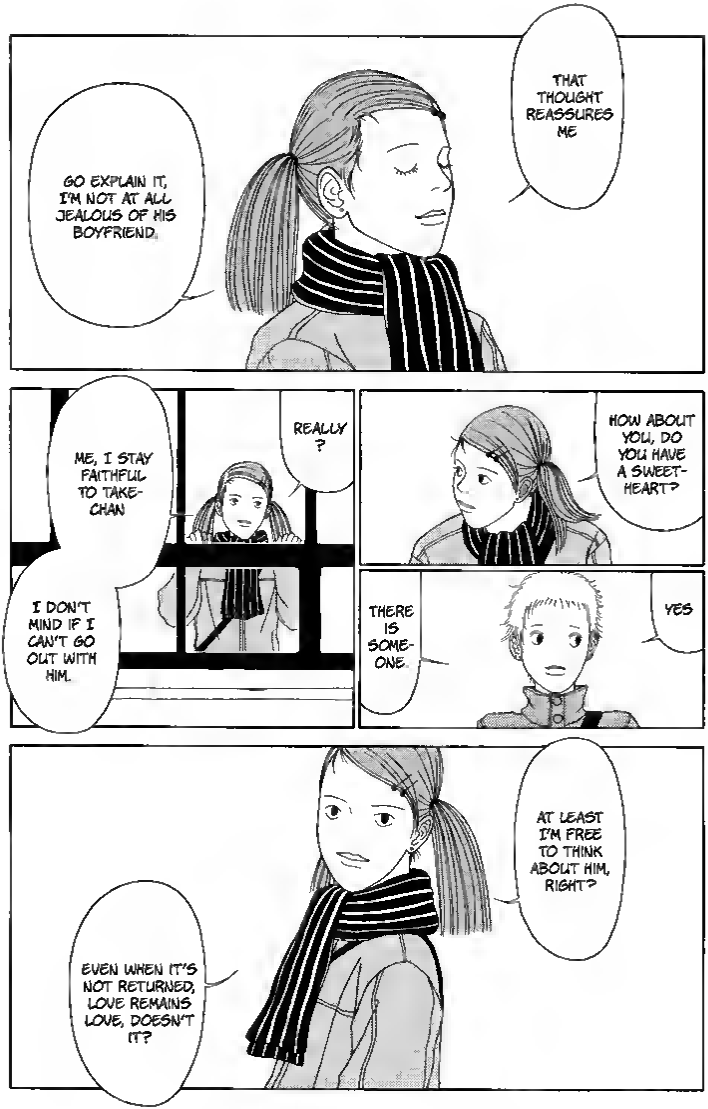
WHY IS IT THAT ALL THESE ASSHOLES CAN'T THINK ABOUT ANYTHING BUT SEX?!
WHAT?
YEAH...
I GOT DUMPED, YESTERDAY. SUPPOSEDLY HE WAS FED UP.
BY FAR TO FUCK HIM...
TAKE-CHAN...
FOR ME TOO, OBVIOUSLY, SEX IS SOMETHING...
I'VE HEARD HE'S ALREADY GOING OUT WITH SOMEONE ELSE AND THAT HE PREFERS...
BUT YOU AGREE THAT HUMAN RELATIONS DON'T STOP THERE, RIGHT?
WHAT I WANT IS A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP...
I'M LOOKING FOR A BOYFRIEND SPECIFICALLY BECAUSE YOU CAN TALK SERIOUSLY WITH A LOVER, AND THAT'S ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL THINGS IN LIFE


I ENVY YOU, YOU KNOW, YOU HAVE YOUR GIRL-FRIEND, A FUTURE LAWYER...
YEAH?
TALKING SERIOUSLY, YOU SAY, BUT I WONDER IF IT HAPPENS TO US..
TAKE-CHAN, HI!
HOW DO YOU PREFER TO FUCK? FOR EXAMPLE, IS THAT A SERIOUS QUESTION?
MMH..
YU-KAKO, !
HEY, YUKAKO, HI!
KUH? IS SOMETHING WRONG BETWEEN YOU GUYS?
PHEW, LUCKY SHE WENT ON HER WAY.
HI!
ICHIKO, HI!

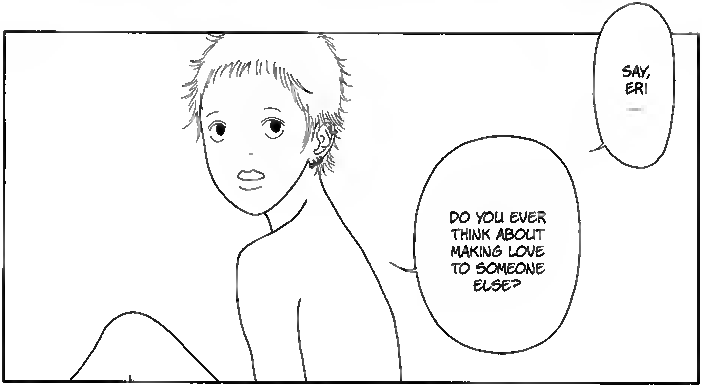
YOU'RE SILLY, WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME BEFORE?
WELL, WHAT'S THE POINT?
WHAT? WE HAVE TO TALK TO HER, TELL HER THE TRUTH!
SHE'LL GET A SHOCK BUT AT LEAST THAT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER, AND THAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.
THIS SITUATION IS TOO DIFFICULT...
I THINK THE BEST THING IS TO LET HER KNOW
WAIT A SECOND, HEY! SO YOU AGREE...
TO COME CLEAN ABOUT EVERYTHING, STRAIGHT OUT?
TAKE-CHAN...

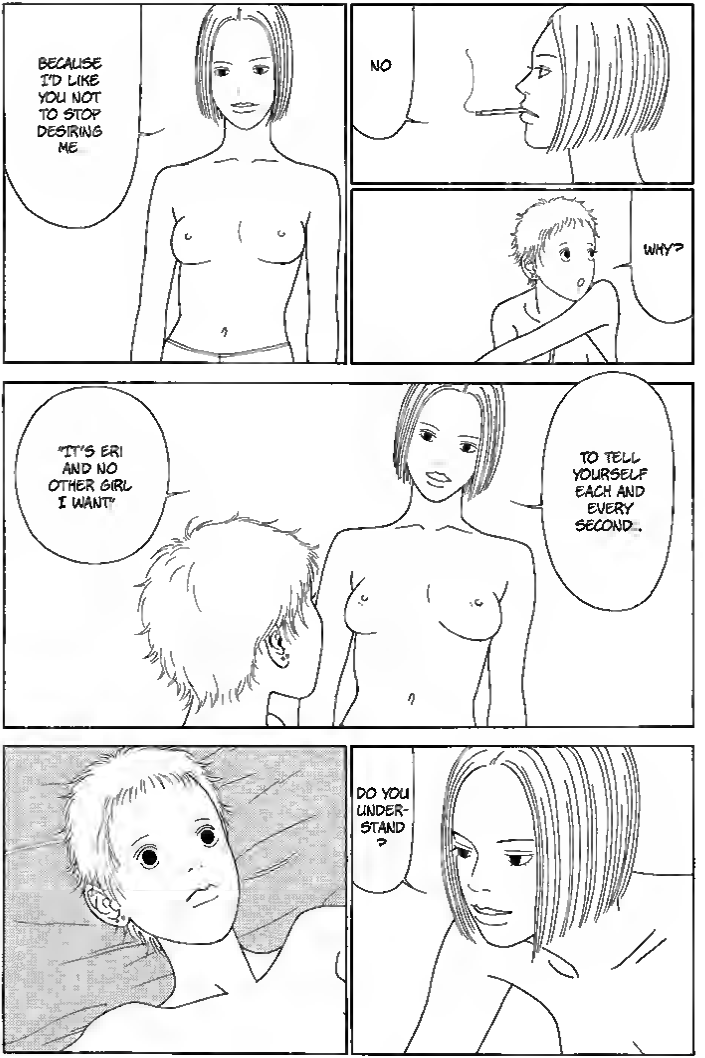

DO YOU FEEL GUILTY ABOUT WHAT YOU DID, ICHIKO?
BUT WHY DID YUKAKO CONFESS TO ME RATHER THAN TO THE PERSON PRINCIPALLY CONCERNED?
IT'S NOT THAT I WANT TO CRITICIZE HER, BUT COME ON -
IF SHE DECIDED TO SPEAK ABOUT IT..
IT'S BECAUSE IT WAS YOU, YOU CAN BE SURE.
HUH?
SHE THOUGHT ABOUT YOU.
"MAYBE SHE'LL BE NICE ENOUGH TO BE A LITTLE SAD."
"BUT MAYBE ALSO TO UNDERSTAND ME"..


I FIGURED IF YOU LEFT TAKE-CHAN, I'D ALSO HAVE MY CHANCE...
BUT I WAS ON THE WRONG TRACK, I SEE
AND THE AFFECTION I FEEL..
DOESN'T EVEN ALLOW ME TO BECOME HIS FRIEND
IT MEANS HE DOESN'T KISS OTHER GIRLS, HE DOESN'T SLEEP WITH THEM...
IF TAKE-CHAN IS GAY..
BUT..
ICHIKO
YES?


THAT THOUGHT REASSURES ME
GO EXPLAIN IT, I'M NOT AT ALL JEALOUS OF HIS BOYFRIEND.
REALLY ?
ME, I STAY FAITHFUL TO TAKE-CHAN
I DON'T MIND IF I CAN'T GO OUT WITH HIM.
HOW ABOUT YOU, DO YOU HAVE A SWEET-HEART?
YES
THERE IS SOME-ONE.
AT LEAST I'M FREE TO THINK ABOUT HIM, RIGHT?
EVEN WHEN IT'S NOT RETURNED, LOVE REMAINS LOVE, DOESN'T IT?

Where does love that's not reciprocated lead?
To be moved at the thought of the other, that's it?
... I wondered, looking at the sky.


SAY, ERI
DO YOU EVER THINK ABOUT MAKING LOVE TO SOMEONE ELSE?


BECAUSE I'D LIKE YOU NOT TO STOP DESIRING ME
NO
WHY?
"IT'S ERI AND NO OTHER GIRL I WANT"
TO TELL YOURSELF EACH AND EVERY SECOND..
DO YOU UNDER-STAND ?

I'M THINKING...
SO, IS IT SORTED OUT?
YEAH, YUKAKO UNDERSTOOD WELL.
AS YOU SAY SO OFTEN..
"WE'LL SEE WHEN THE TIME COMES"
GO TALK ABOUT YOU WITHOUT THINKING →
THERE'S NO CHANCE SHE'LL DO SOMETHING SILLY?

I HAVE NO LUCK WITH GUYS, OK
NOT AT ALL, ICHIKO
I GET THE FEELING I'M NO HELP TO YOU, THAT I KEEP BOTHERING YOU ON THE CONTRARY
IS THE BIGGEST JOY
EVEN SO, I'M POSITIVE THAT HAVING GOOD FRIENDS
HUH, SERIOUSLY ...?
HEY...
I TELL YOU, THE PLACE IS GREAT!
DON'T YOU WANT TO COME TONIGHT?
YAP
YAP
YAP
YAP

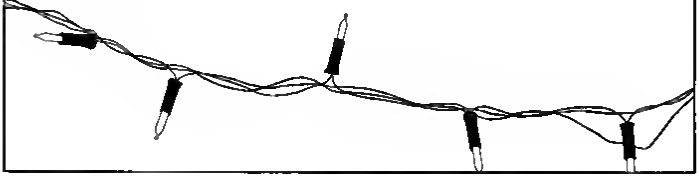
I ended up thinking...

Eri frowns every time I tell her "You're too good."

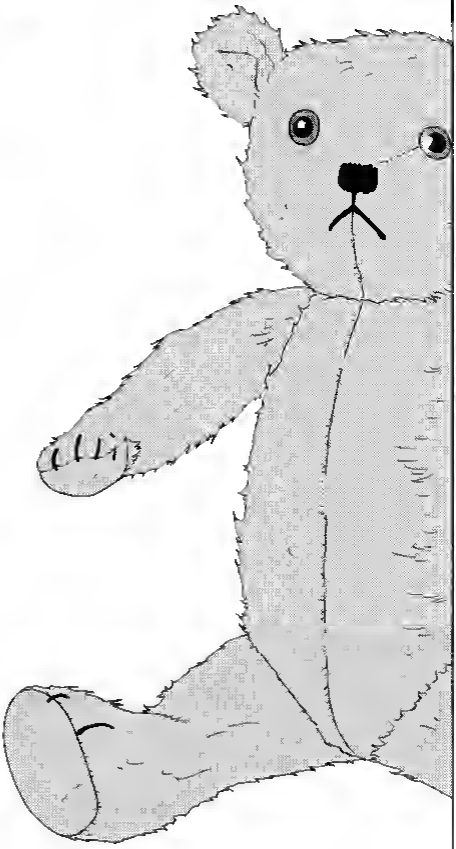
Take-chan immediately started looking for a new boyfriend.

The city is adorned with Christmas lights.

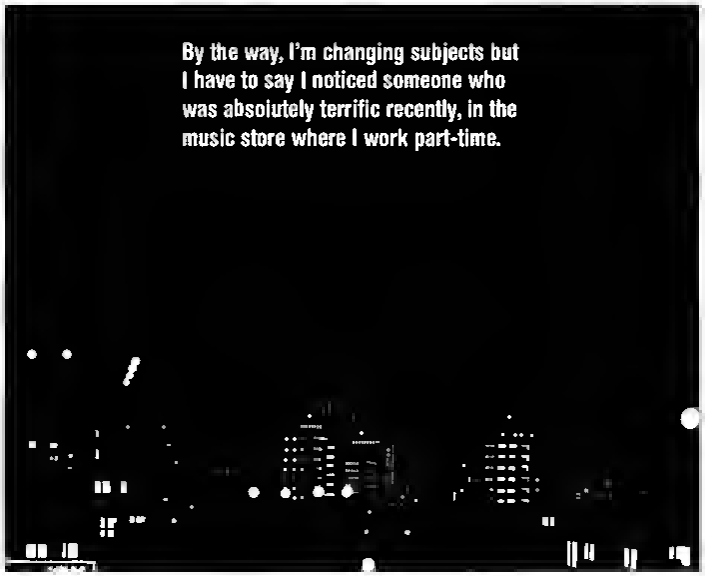
... she's shy!

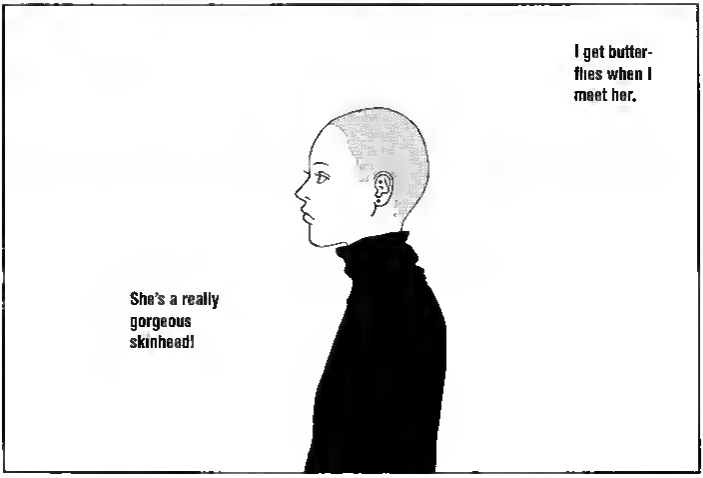


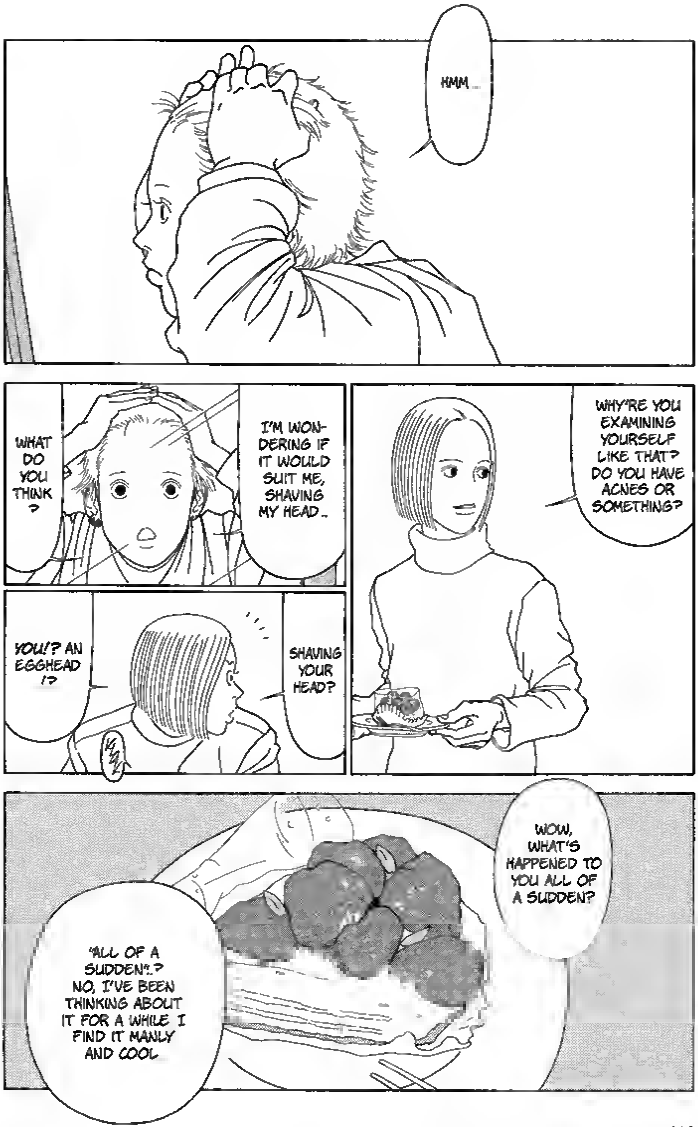
Chapter 7 - Alone

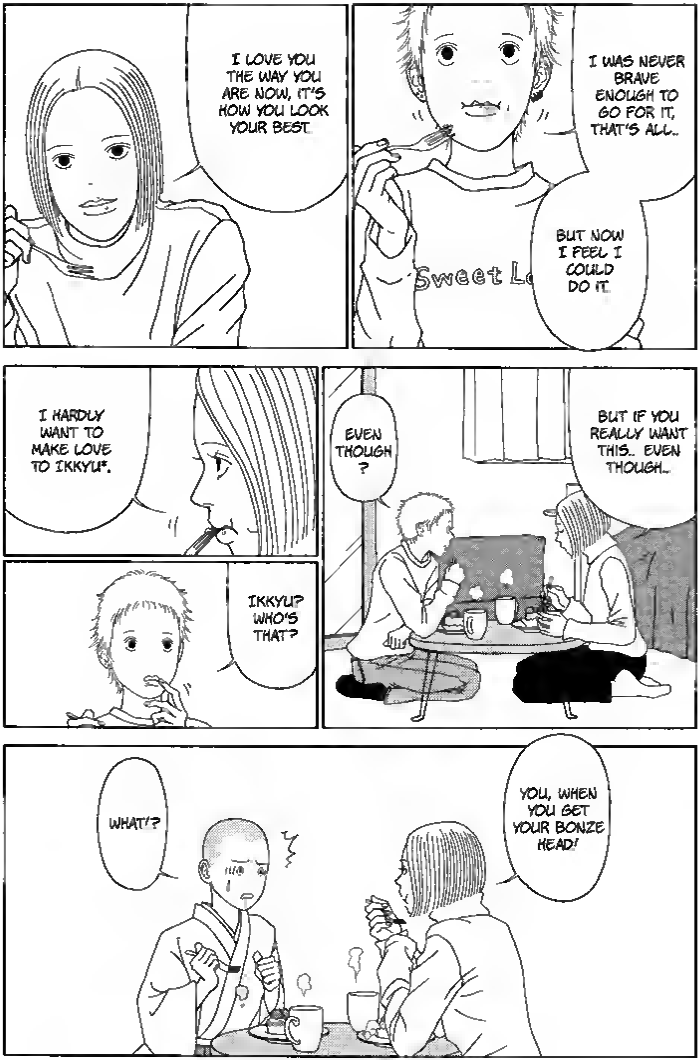


Hello, this is Ichiko. I'm listening to "Alone," by Stephen Simmonds.
I just love this tune.
The kind of things he sings.
Without you I feel alone, I'm blue, no desires. .
Stephen Simmonds
Alone
Loneliness has many facns.
It can mean being all by yourself on a deserted island, but parha, s also the sense of being lost in the middle of a crowd ..
These are the kind of thoughts that suddenly come to me.

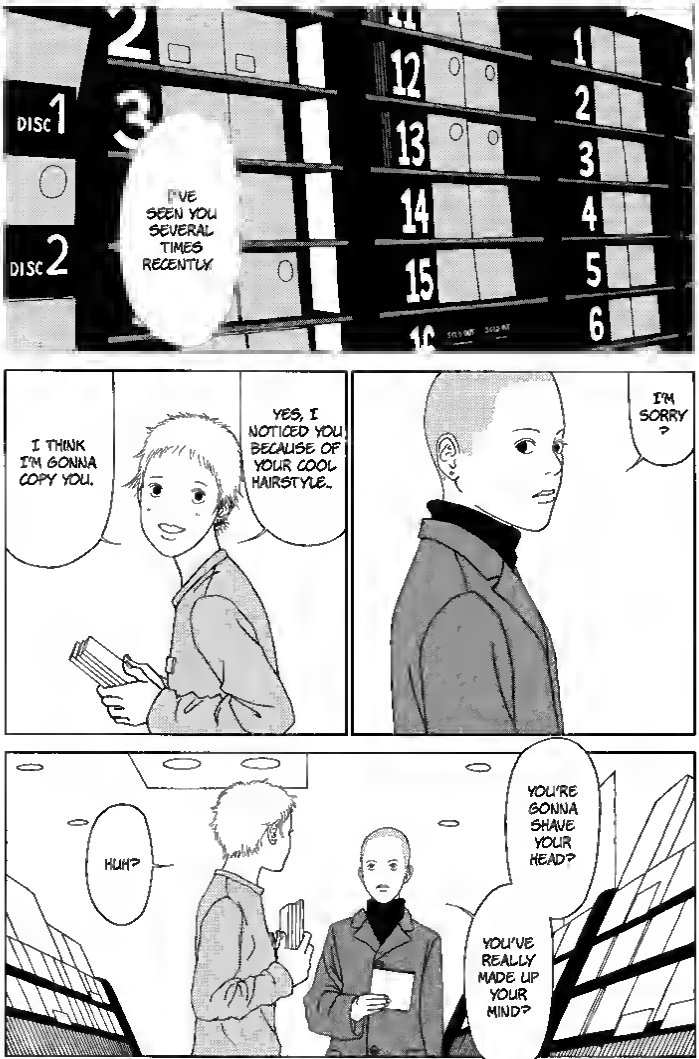

By the way, I'm changing subjects but I have to say I noticed someone who was absolutely terrific recently, in the music store where I work part-time.

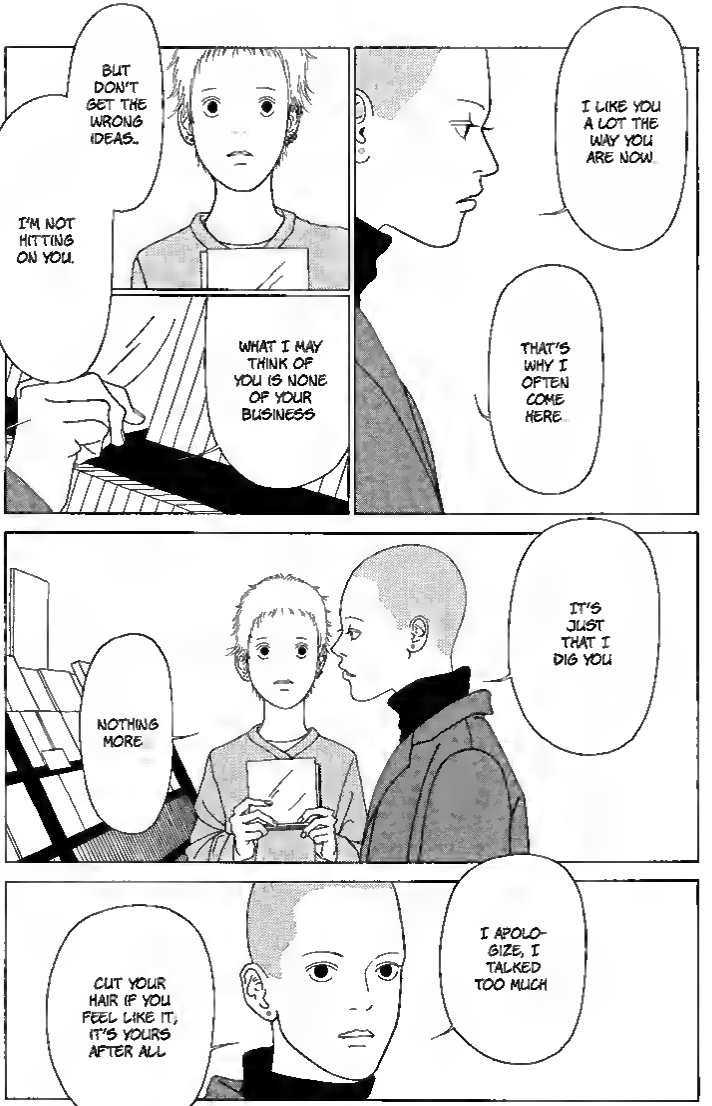

I get butterflies when I meet her.
She's a really gorgeous skinhead!


HMM...
I'M WONDERING IF IT WOULD SUIT ME, SHAVING MY HEAD..
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
WHY'RE YOU EXAMINING YOURSELF LIKE THAT? DO YOU HAVE ACNES OR SOMETHING?
SHAVING YOUR HEAD?
YOU!? AN EGGHEAD!?
WOW, WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU ALL OF A SUDDEN?
"ALL OF A SUDDEN"? NO, I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT FOR A WHILE I FIND IT MANLY AND COOL


I LOVE YOU THE WAY YOU ARE NOW, IT'S HOW YOU LOOK YOUR BEST.
I WAS NEVER BRAVE ENOUGH TO GO FOR IT, THAT'S ALL..
BUT NOW I FEEL I COULD DO IT.
I HARDLY WANT TO MAKE LOVE TO IKKYU*.
EVEN THOUGH ?
BUT IF YOU REALLY WANT THIS.. EVEN THOUGH..
IKKYU? WHO'S THAT?
WHAT!?
YOU, WHEN YOU GET YOUR BONZE HEAD!

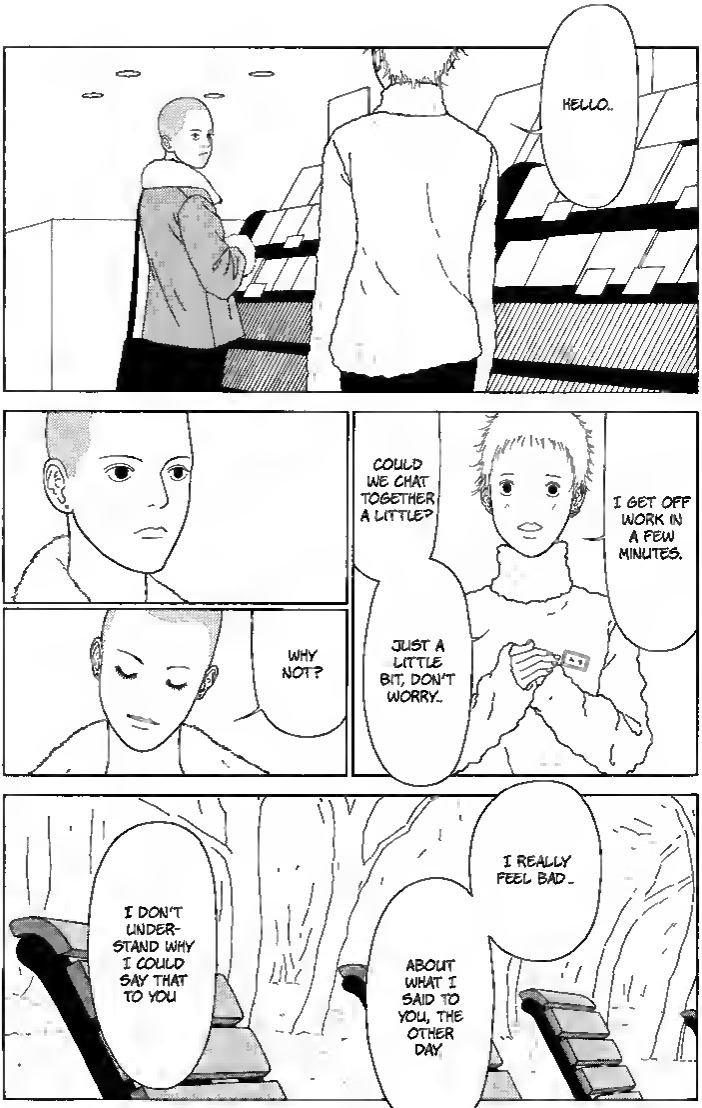
* Ikkyu: monk and popular Zen master of the XVth century very popular historical figure in Japan


DISC 1
DISC 2
I'VE SEEN YOU SEVERAL TIMES RECENTLY.
YES, I NOTICED YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR COOL HAIRSTYLE..
I THINK I'M GONNA COPY YOU.
I'M SORRY ?
YOU'RE GONNA SHAVE YOUR HEAD?
YOU'VE REALLY MADE UP YOUR MIND?
HUM?

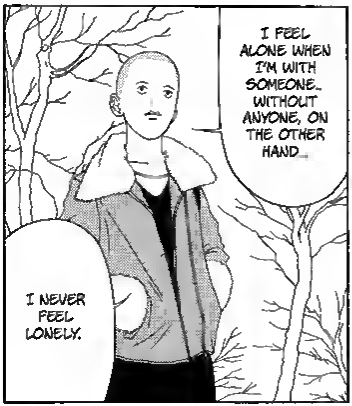

I LIKE YOU A LOT THE WAY YOU ARE NOW.
THAT'S WHY I OFTEN COME HERE.
BUT DON'T GET THE WRONG IDEAS..
I'M NOT HITTING ON YOU.
WHAT I MAY THINK OF YOU IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS
IT'S JUST THAT I DIG YOU
NOTHING MORE.
I APOLOGIZE, I TALKED TOO MUCH
CUT YOUR HAIR IF YOU FEEL LIKE IT, IT'S YOURS AFTER ALL

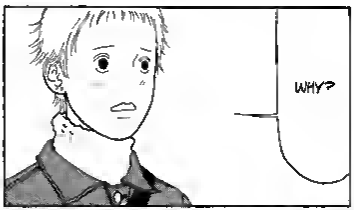
HUH, SO YOU GAVE UP ON IT ONCE AGAIN?
WELL, CONSIDERING THE LOOK ON YOUR FACE...
WHAT? YOU MEAN IT'S MY FAULT?
BUT THE OTHER DAY, YOU SEEMED QUITE DETERMINED TO CUT YOUR HAIR!
ANYWAY, IT DOESN'T SEEM PRACTICAL TO HAVE A BARE HEAD DURING WINTER..
AND I BEGAN TO THINK THAT IT ISN'T REALLY BAD THE WAY IT IS NOW
AND I THOUGHT IKKYU ALSO HAD HIS OWN CHARM!
I'M NOT IKKYU!!

YOU KNOW WHAT, I WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THIS WHIM OF YOURS...
AND I REMEMBERED SOMETHING.
HUH?
REMEMBER, THE PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION I LENT YOU A WHILE AGO...
AND THAT WONDERFUL SKINHEAD MODEL...
WOULD THAT BE WHERE IT CAME FROM?

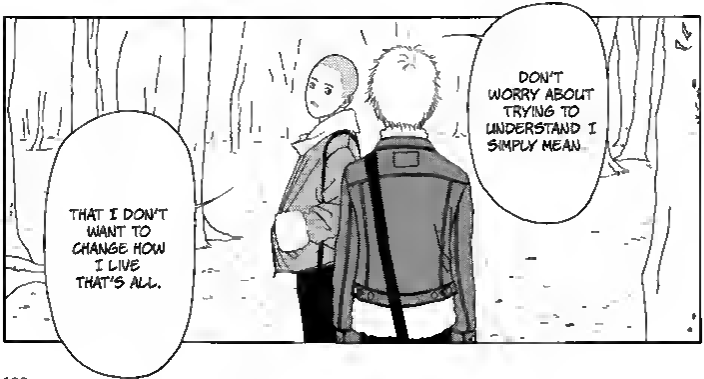

HELLO..
I GET OFF WORK IN A FEW MINUTES.
COULD WE CHAT TOGETHER A LITTLE?
JUST A LITTLE BIT, DON'T WORRY..
WHY NOT?
I REALLY FEEL BAD.
ABOUT WHAT I SAID TO YOU, THE OTHER DAY.
I DON'T UNDER-STAND WHY I COULD SAY THAT TO YOU

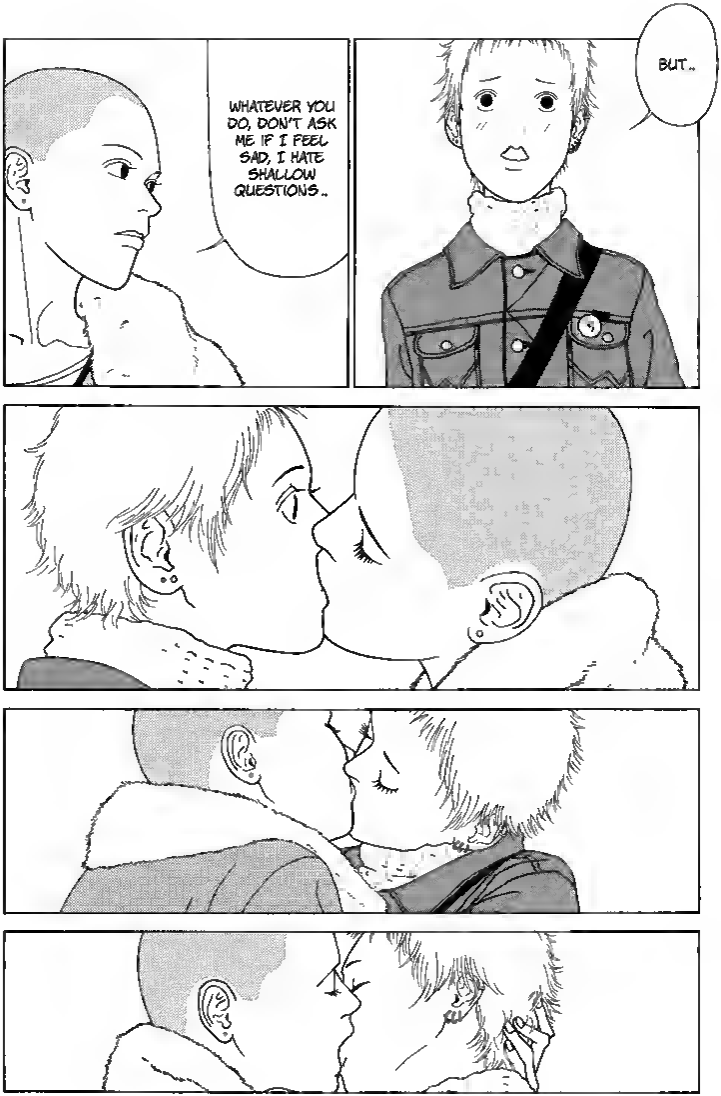
I DON'T WANT TO KNOW YOU...
OR FOR YOU TO BE INTERESTED IN ME

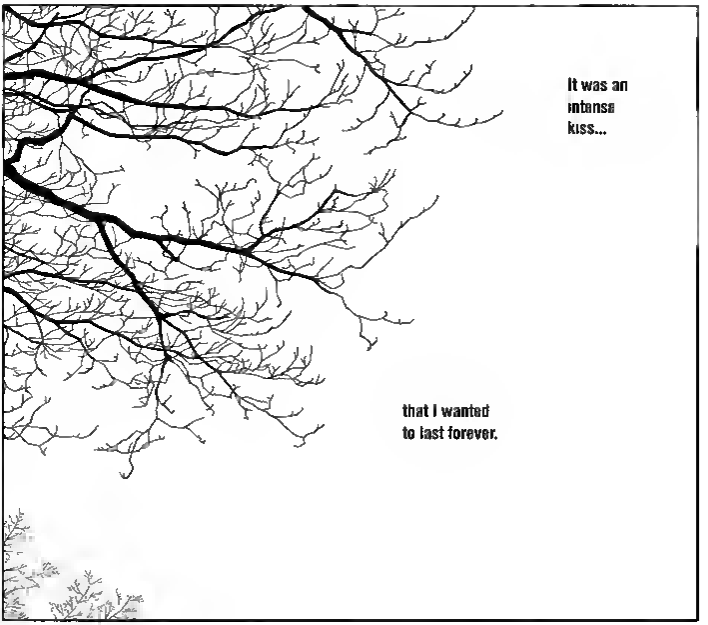

I FEEL ALONE WHEN I'M WITH SOMEONE... WITHOUT ANYONE, ON THE OTHER HAND...
I NEVER FEEL LONELY.

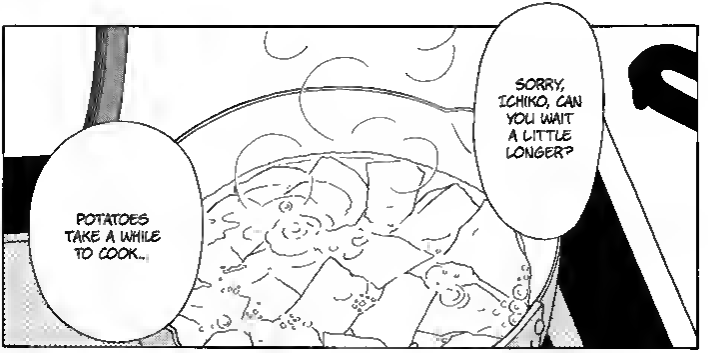

WHY?

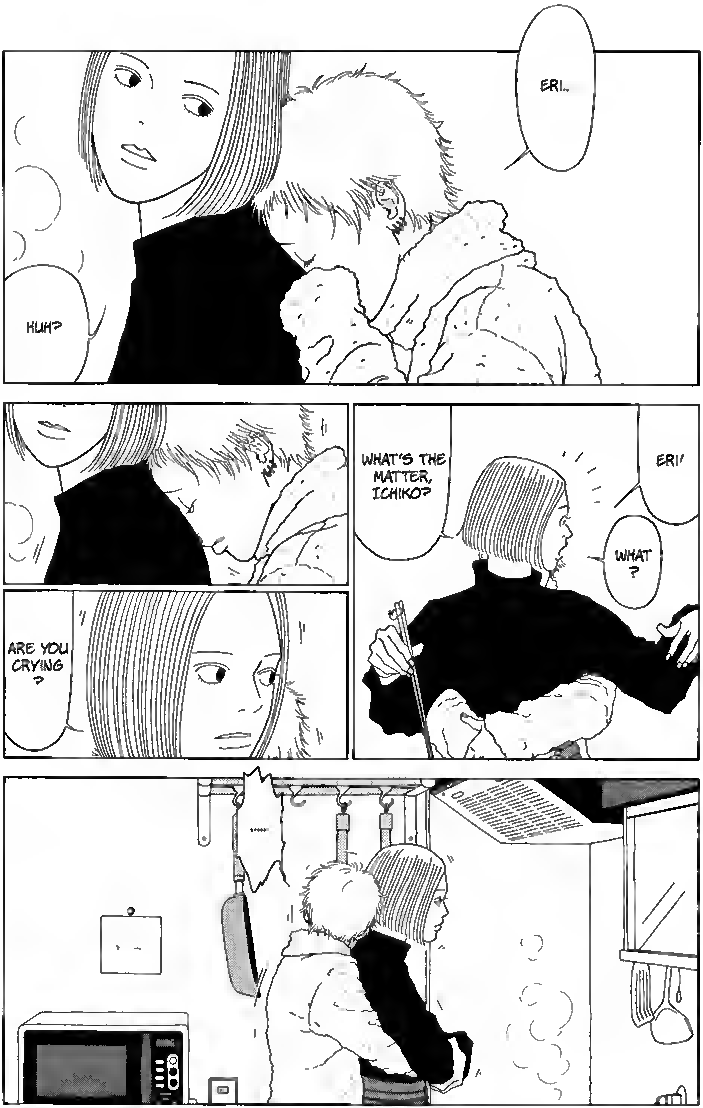
I LIKE SOLITUDE.

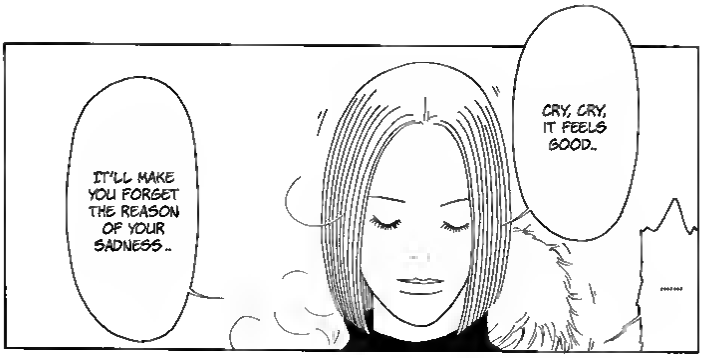

DON'T WORRY ABOUT TRYING TO UNDERSTAND I SIMPLY MEAN...
THAT I DON'T WANT TO CHANGE HOW I LIVE THAT'S ALL.


WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T ASK ME IF I FEEL SAD, I HATE SHALLOW QUESTIONS..
BUT..


It was an intense kiss...
that I wanted to last forever.


SORRY, ICHIKO, CAN YOU WAIT A LITTLE LONGER?
POTATOES TAKE A WHILE TO COOK...

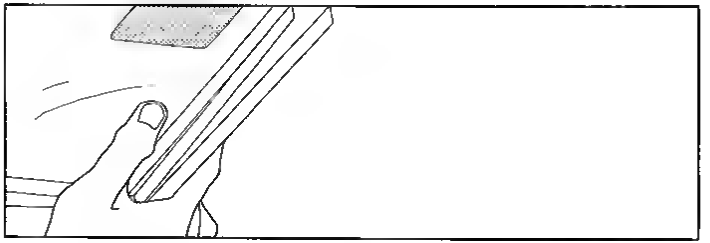

ERI...
HUH?
WHAT'S THE MATTER, ICHIKO?
ERI!
WHAT?
ARE YOU CRYING?

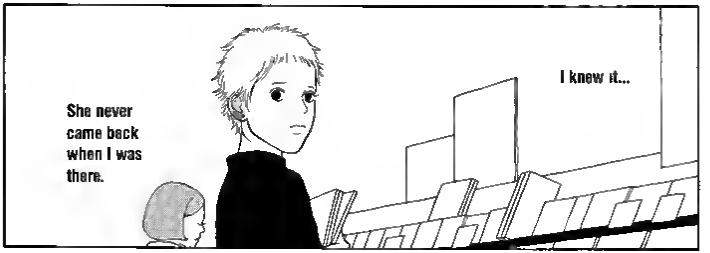


I wanted to leave each one of them in their own world.

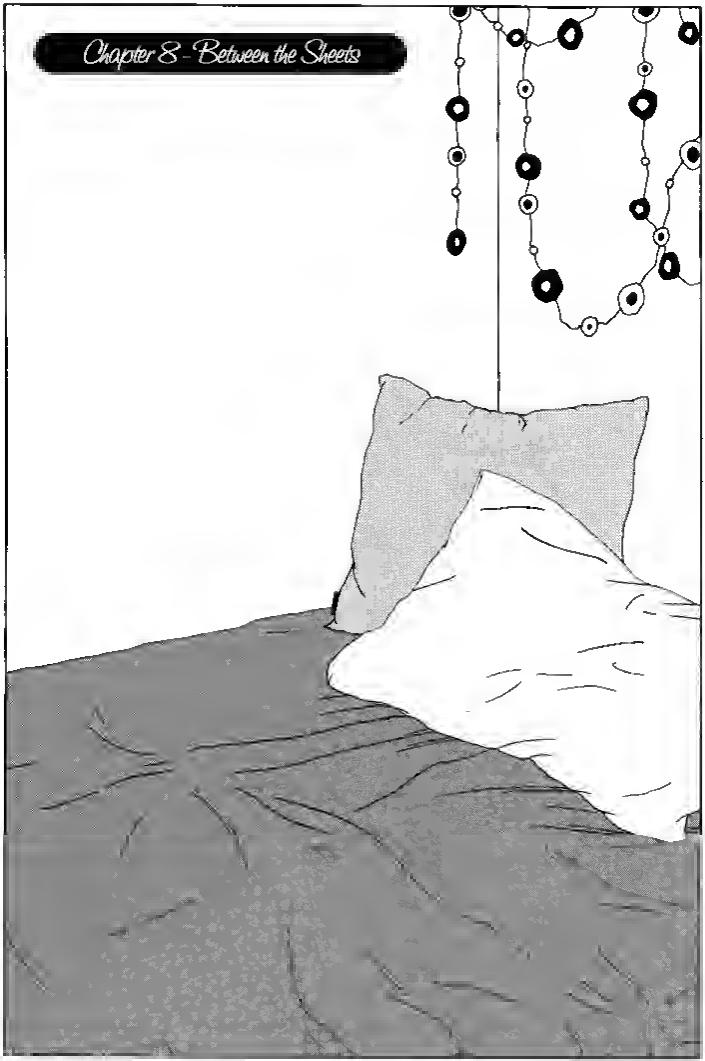
Maybe I was wrong in doing so, but I absolutely wanted to avoid making a link between her and the other girl.

I didn't tell Eri anything



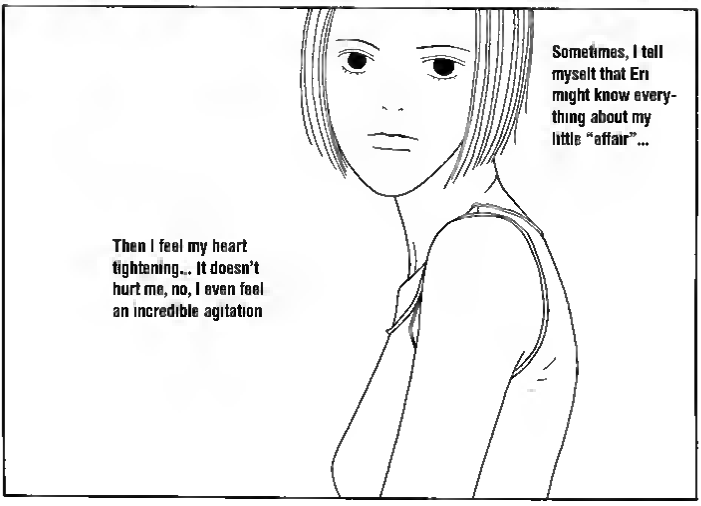


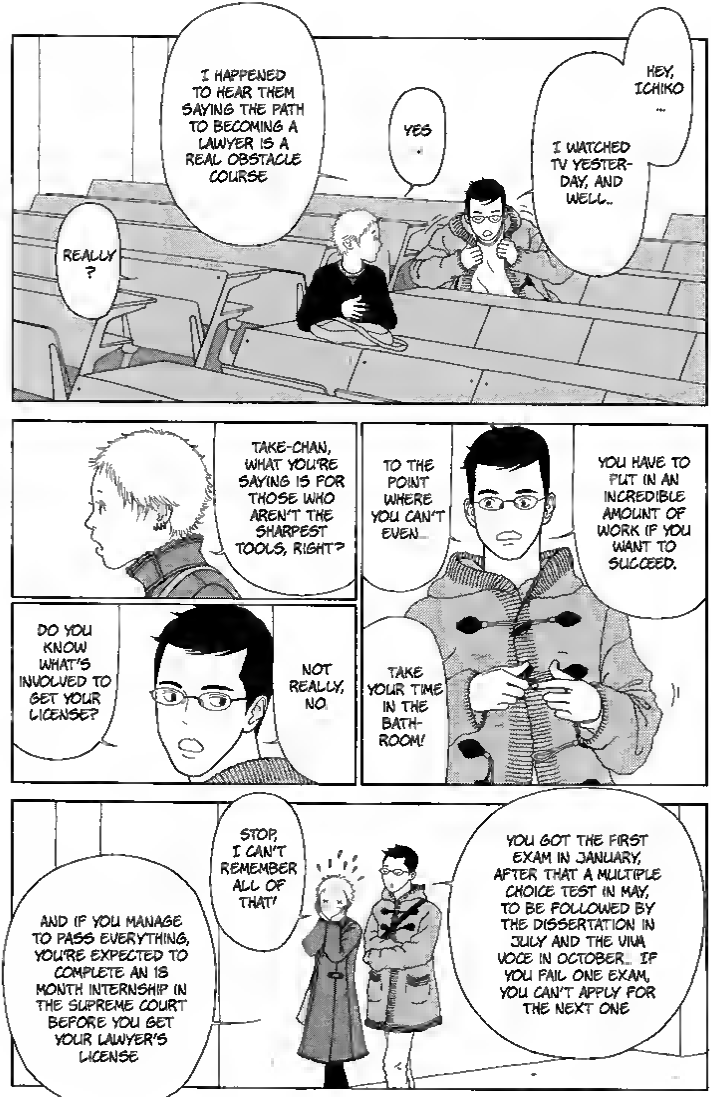
Considering what happened between us, now that you're no longer there I feel terribly lonely.
How about you?
What do you feel right now?
But I'm glad that things turned out this way.
I have Eri... I couldn't love the other girl.


Chapter 8 - Between the Sheets

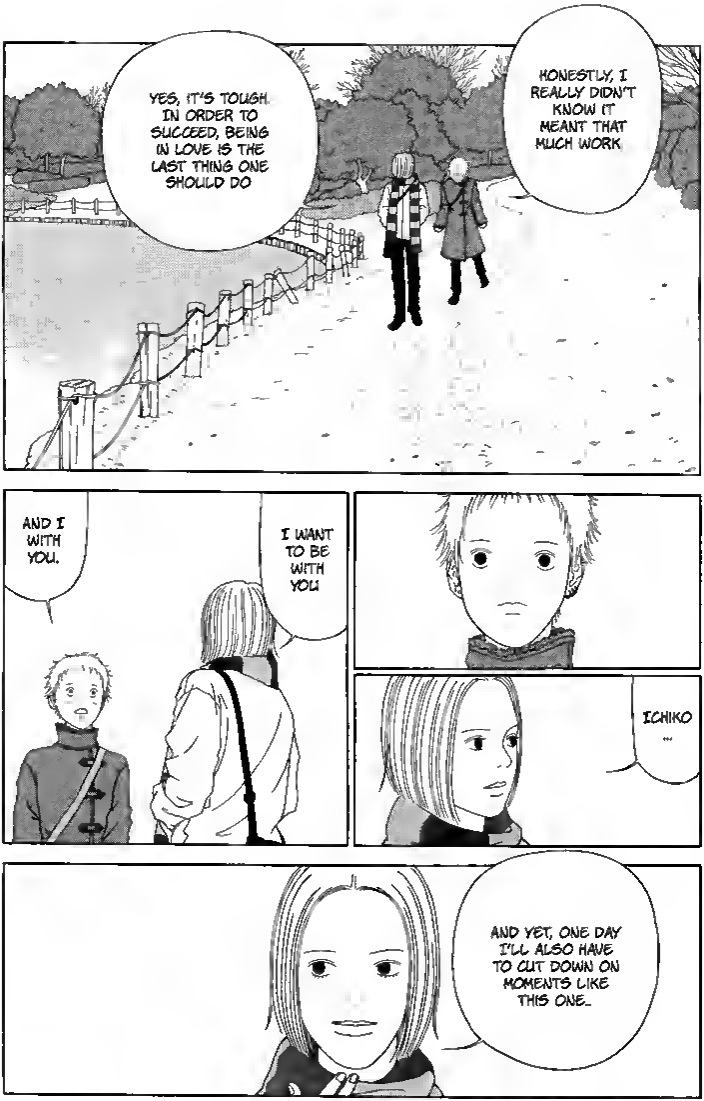
Hello, this is Ichiko. Right now, I'm preoccupied thinking of a valentine's day present.
A present for Eri it should go without saying.
I spotted a simple platinum necklace.
It'd make me so happy to see her wearing it like a talisman... Problem: its price.
I'm sure it'll suit her..
While I adored Eri just as much as ever, I felt attracted to another person.
For a little while there, I was disturbed...

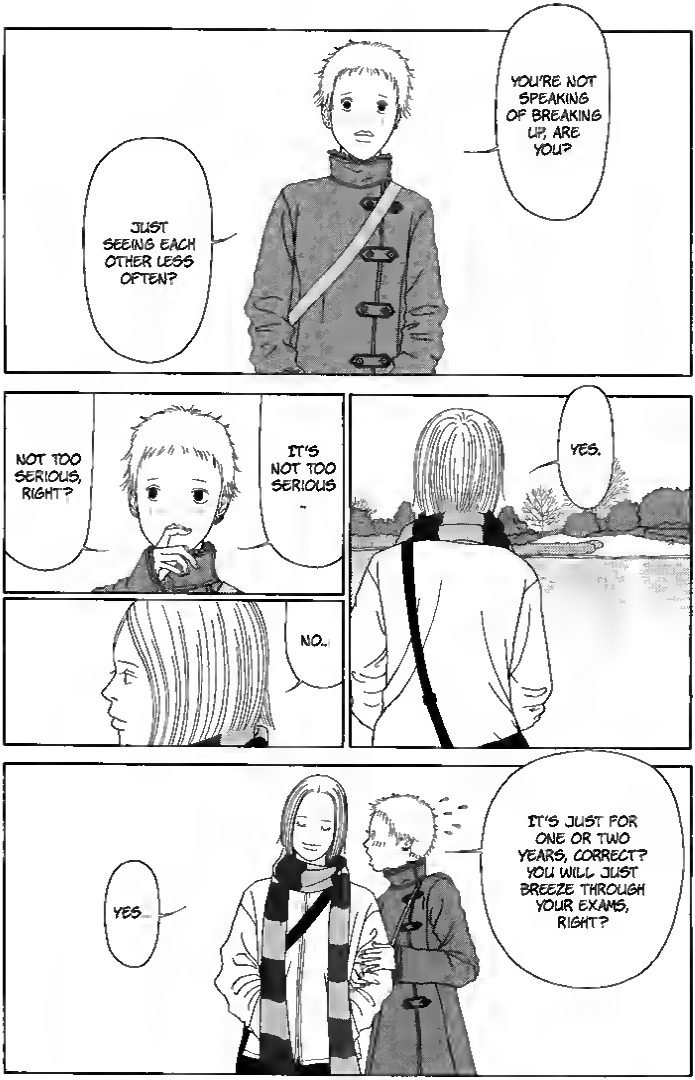
I myself can't explain what happened to me, so I locked it in a box and left it there.


Sometimes, I tell myself that Eri might know everything about my little "affair"...
Then I feel my heart tightening... It doesn't hurt me, no, I even feel an incredible agitation


HEY, ICHIKO ...
I WATCHED TV YESTERDAY, AND WELL..
YES ..
I HAPPENED TO HEAR THEM SAYING THE PATH TO BECOMING A LAWYER IS A REAL OBSTACLE COURSE
REALLY ?
TAKE-CHAN, WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS FOR THOSE WHO AREN'T THE SHARPEST TOOLS, RIGHT?
YOU HAVE TO PUT IN AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF WORK IF YOU WANT TO SUCCEED.
TO THE POINT WHERE YOU CAN'T EVEN...
TAKE YOUR TIME IN THE BATHROOM!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S INVOLVED TO GET YOUR LICENSE?
NOT REALLY, NO
YOU GOT THE FIRST EXAM IN JANUARY, AFTER THAT A MULTIPLE CHOICE TEST IN MAY, TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE DISSERTATION IN JULY AND THE VIVA VOCE IN OCTOBER.. IF YOU FAIL ONE EXAM, YOU CAN'T APPLY FOR THE NEXT ONE
STOP, I CAN'T REMEMBER ALL OF THAT!
AND IF YOU MANAGE TO PASS EVERYTHING, YOU'RE EXPECTED TO COMPLETE AN 18 MONTH INTERNSHIP IN THE SUPREME COURT BEFORE YOU GET YOUR LAWYER'S LICENSE

WELL, I DIDN'T KNOW ALL THAT...
LET'S SAY IT PROVES HOW MUCH BEING A LAWYER HAS ITS RESPONSI-BILITIES
MHH..
AND YOU REALLY THINK EVERY-BODY HAS TO GO THROUGH ALL THAT, EVEN SOMEONE WHO'S PARTICULARLY SMART?
I ASSUME ERI KNOWS ABOUT THIS?
YOU BET SHE DOES!
...
MAYBE NOT. AFTER ALL, THERE MUST BE EXCEP-TIONS!
NO, WAIT, ICHIKO, WAIT!

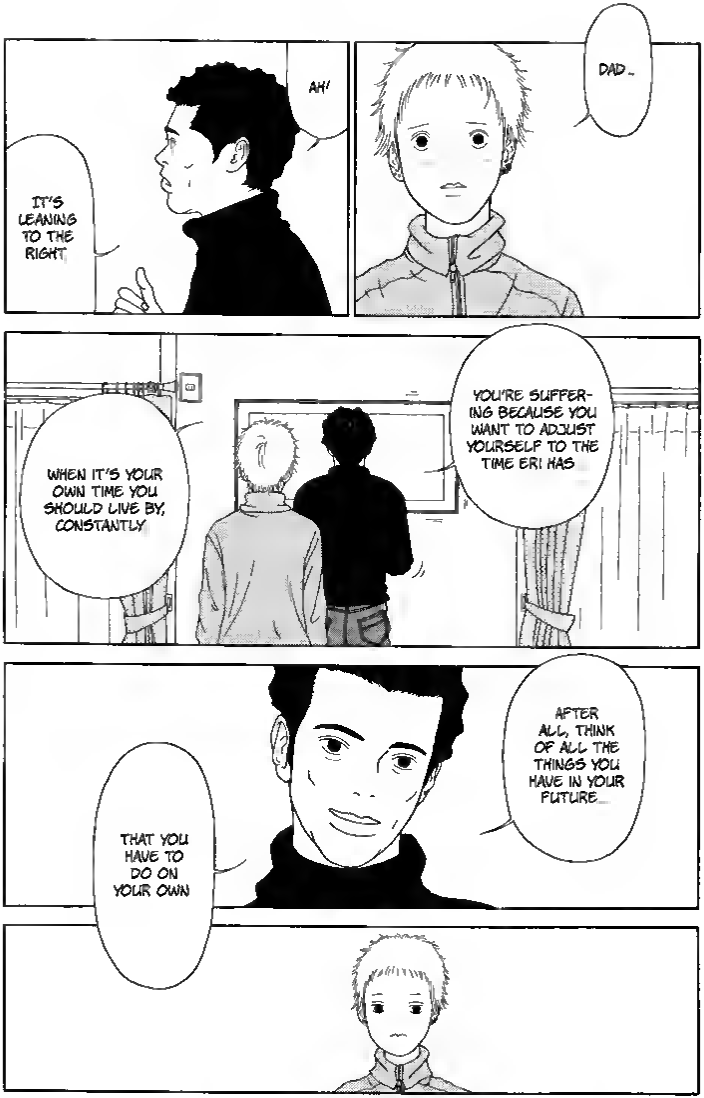

YES, IT'S TOUGH. IN ORDER TO SUCCEED, BEING IN LOVE IS THE LAST THING ONE SHOULD DO
HONESTLY, I REALLY DIDN'T KNOW IT MEANT THAT MUCH WORK
I WANT TO BE WITH YOU
AND I WITH YOU.
ICHIKO ...
AND YET, ONE DAY I'LL ALSO HAVE TO CUT DOWN ON MOMENTS LIKE THIS ONE...

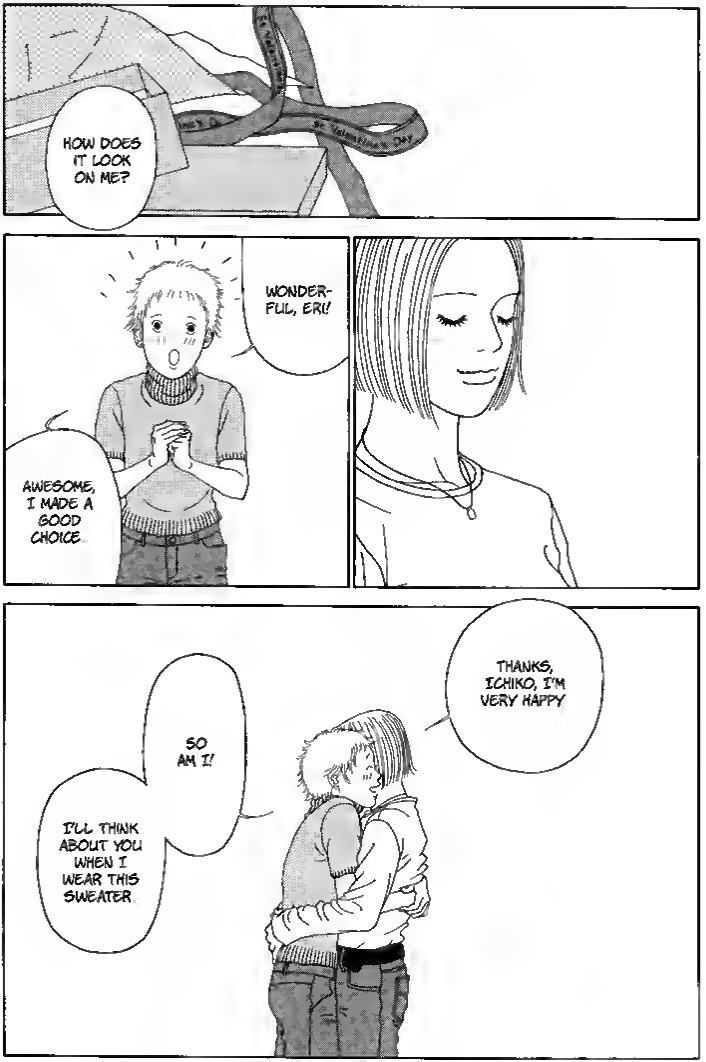

YOU'RE NOT SPEAKING OF BREAKING UP, ARE YOU?
JUST SEEING EACH OTHER LESS OFTEN?
IT'S NOT TOO SERIOUS.
NOT TOO SERIOUS, RIGHT?
YES.
NO..
IT'S JUST FOR ONE OR TWO YEARS, CORRECT? YOU WILL JUST BREEZE THROUGH YOUR EXAMS, RIGHT?
YES.

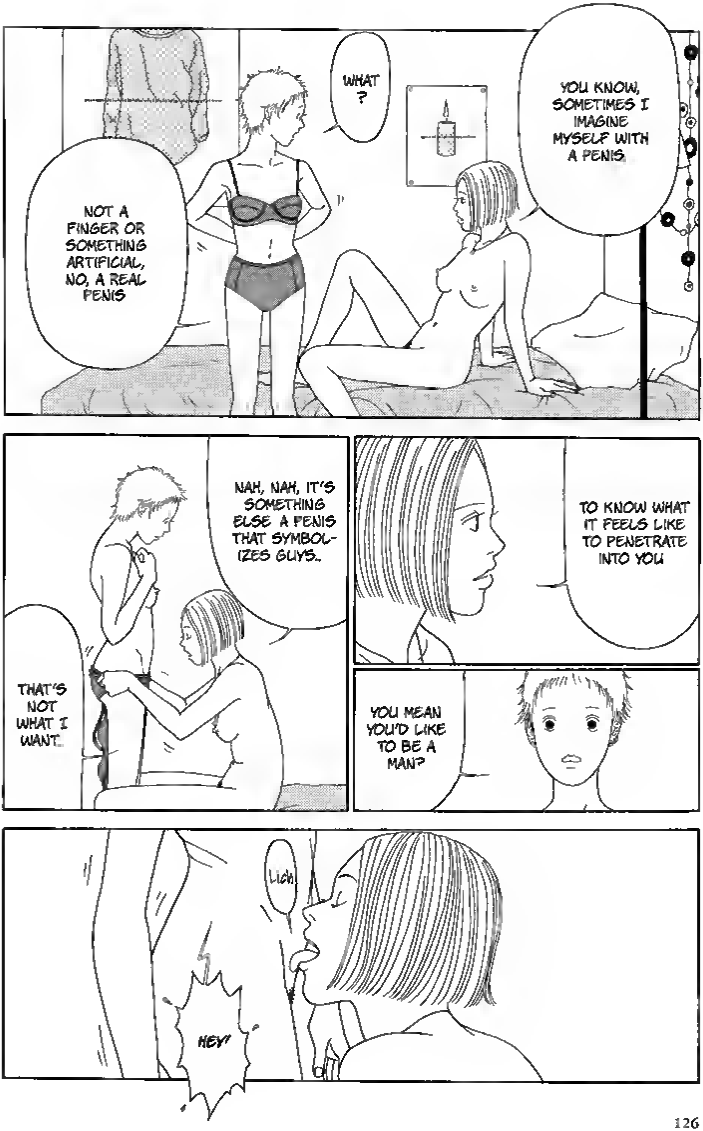
Even so, I wonder how it feels not to see each other for a whole year.. I honestly can't imagine being in that situation.

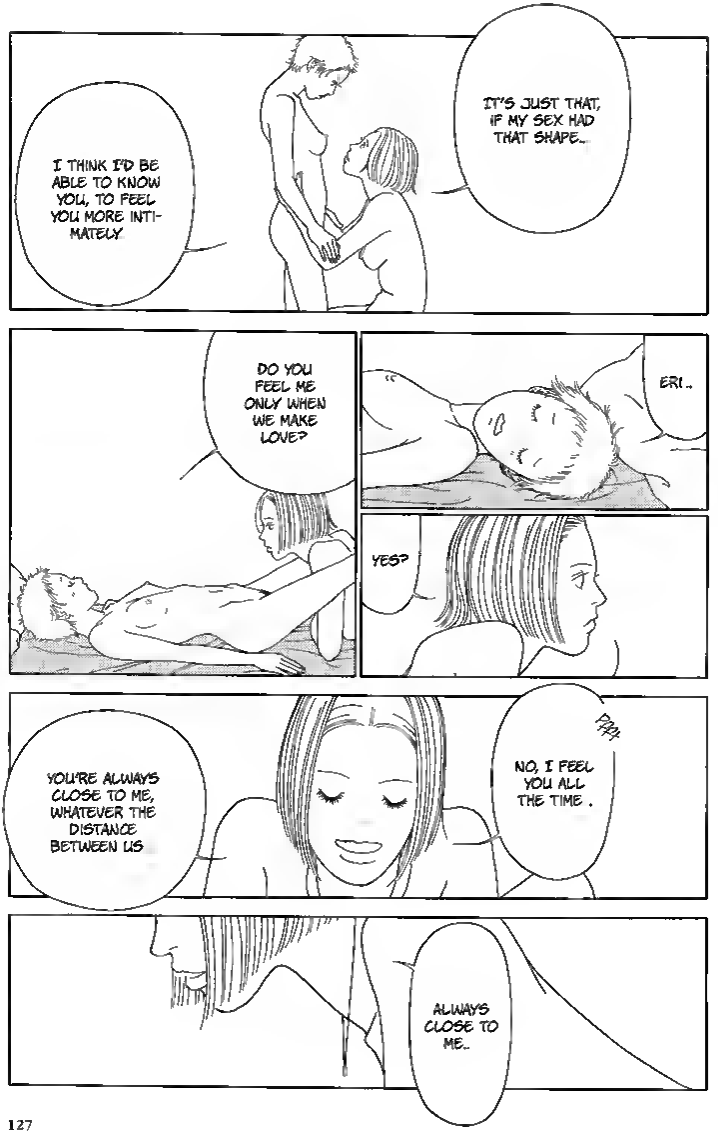
BOM!
BOM!
BOM!
MMH?
DAD...
HUH?
HOW HAS IT LASTED SO LONG BETWEEN YOU AND TACHIBANA-SAN?
YOU'RE BOTH BUSY, AND WITH ME HERE.. YOU HAVE SO LITTLE TIME TO SEE EACH OTHER...
I WONDER IF I COULD TAKE THAT...

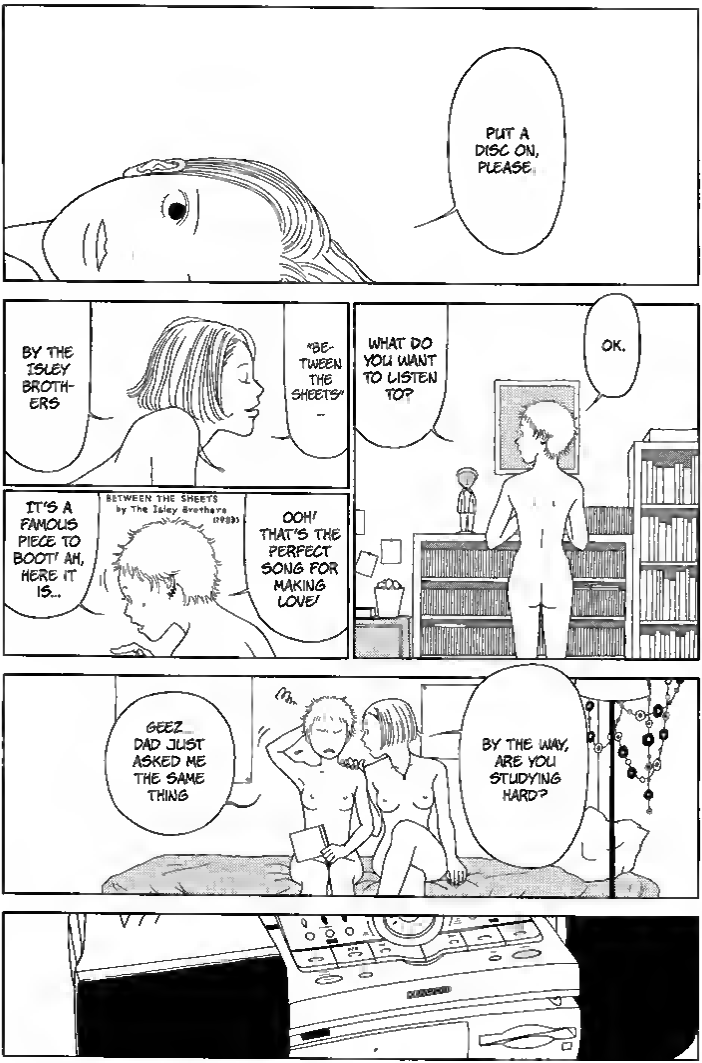
BOM!
BOM!
BOM!
BOM!
I SEE ..
SOON ERI'LL BE ABSORBED IN HER STUDY FOR THE EXAMS
WE WON'T BE ABLE TO SEE EACH OTHER AS MUCH AS NOW ..
WELL, IS IT STRAIGHT?
IN MY OPINION, THE GAP IN THE WORK THE TWO OF YOU HAVE AHEAD OF YOU TO BECOMING A LAWYER AND A TRANSLATOR ISN'T REALLY THAT VAST
YES, IT'S FINE LIKE THAT
BUT PEOPLE DO HAVE TO MOVE ON TO SERIOUS THINGS ONE DAY, AND THAT GOES FOR YOU TOO, DOESN'T IT?
HOW SO?
IT'D BE BETTER FOR YOU TO BREAK UP ONCE AND FOR ALL AND EACH FIND LOVE SOMEWHERE ELSE. IT'S NOT WORTH TORMENTING YOURSELF, DON'T YOU THINK?
IF IT ALL ENDED WITH THIS SEPARATION, IT WOULD PROVE THAT THINGS WEREN'T THAT DEEP BETWEEN YOU TWO

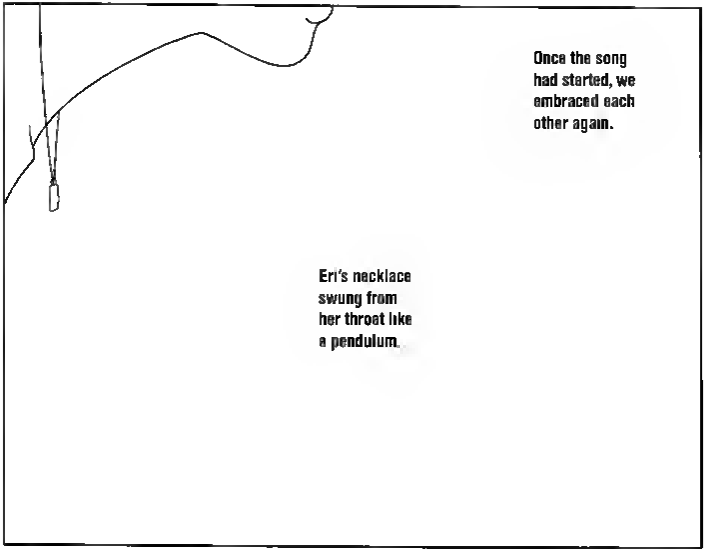

DAD...
AH!
IT'S LEANING TO THE RIGHT
YOU'RE SUFFERING BECAUSE YOU WANT TO ADJUST YOURSELF TO THE TIME ER! HAS
WHEN IT'S YOUR OWN TIME YOU SHOULD LIVE BY, CONSTANTLY
AFTER ALL, THINK OF ALL THE THINGS YOU HAVE IN YOUR FUTURE...
THAT YOU HAVE TO DO ON YOUR OWN


HOW DOES IT LOOK ON ME?
WONDERFUL, ERI!
AWESOME, I MADE A GOOD CHOICE.
THANKS, ICHIKO, I'M VERY HAPPY
SO AM I!
I'LL THINK ABOUT YOU WHEN I WEAR THIS SWEATER.

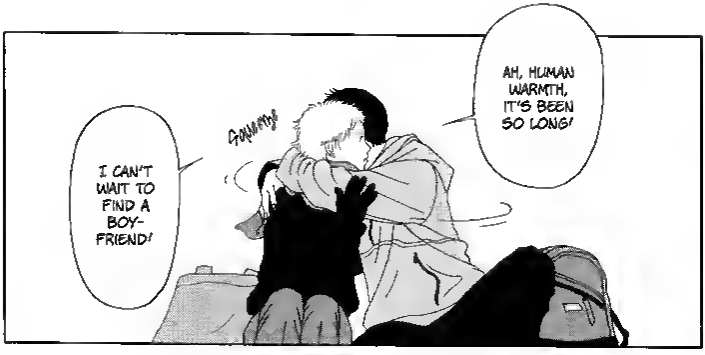

YOU KNOW, SOMETIMES I IMAGINE MYSELF WITH A PENIS.
WHAT ?
NOT A FINGER OR SOMETHING ARTIFICIAL, NO, A REAL PENIS
NAH, NAH, IT'S SOMETHING ELSE A PENIS THAT SYMBOLIZES GUYS..
THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANT..
TO KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO PENETRATE INTO YOU
YOU MEAN YOU'D LIKE TO BE A MAN?
LICK
HEY!


I THINK I'D BE ABLE TO KNOW YOU, TO FEEL YOU MORE INTIMATELY.
IT'S JUST THAT, IF MY SEX HAD THAT SHAPE...
DO YOU FEEL ME ONLY WHEN WE MAKE LOVE?
ERI..
YES?
YOU'RE ALWAYS CLOSE TO ME, WHATEVER THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US.
PPP!
NO, I FEEL YOU ALL THE TIME.
ALWAYS CLOSE TO ME..


PUT A DISC ON, PLEASE.
OK.
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LISTEN TO?
"BETWEEN THE SHEETS"...
BY THE ISLEY BROTHERS
OOH! THAT'S THE PERFECT SONG FOR MAKING LOVE!
BETWEEN THE SHEETS by The Isley Brothers (1983)
IT'S A FAMOUS PIECE TO BOOT! AH, HERE IT IS...
BY THE WAY, ARE YOU STUDYING HARD?
GEEZ... DAD JUST ASKED ME THE SAME THING

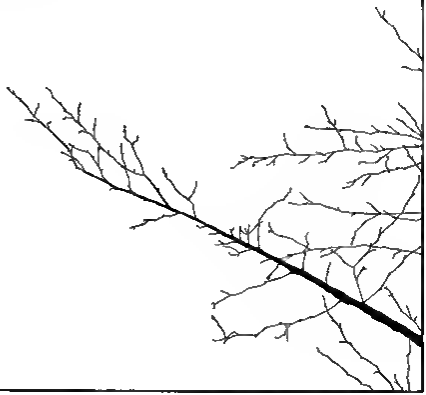

Once the song had started, we embraced each other again.
Eri's necklace swung from her throat like a pendulum.

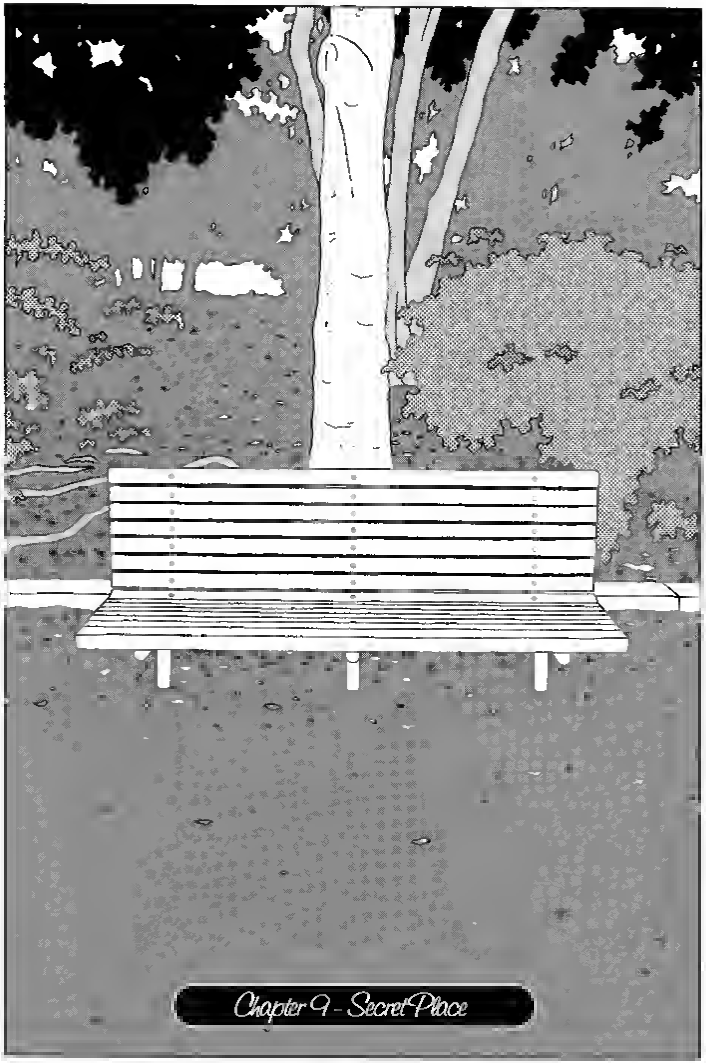
I'D LIKE TO GIVE YOU A HUG...
HEY, DO YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES?
HUH?
WELL, IF YOU WANT...
THEY'RE A DAY LATE, SORRY I THOUGHT I'D SEE YOU YESTERDAY
OH, IT'S NICE OF YOU TO GIVE ME THESE CHOCOLATES...
IT DOESN'T MATTER



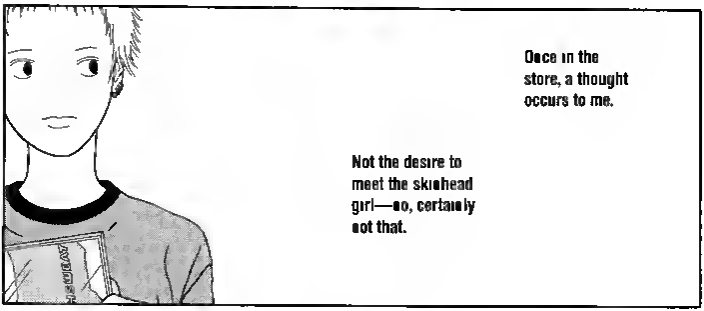
The wind was freezing, spring still far away.

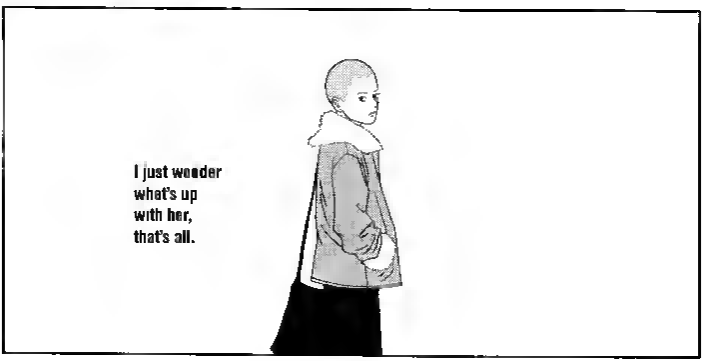
For Take-chan, I must have represented happiness. I closed both my arms tightly around his wide back.

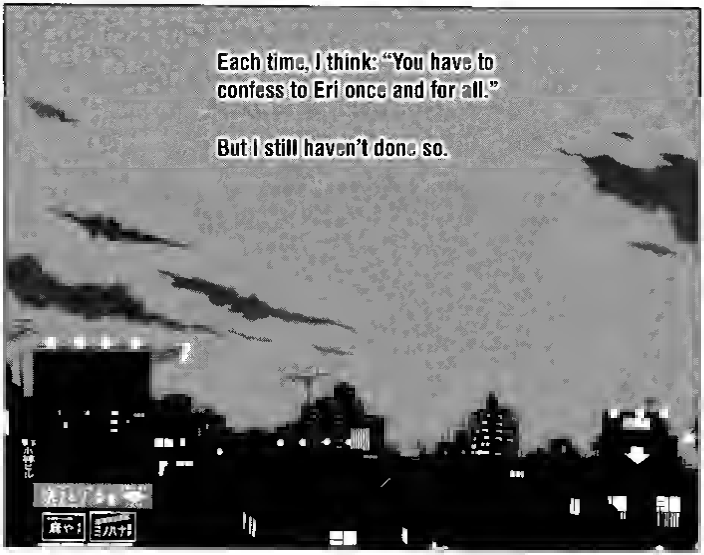


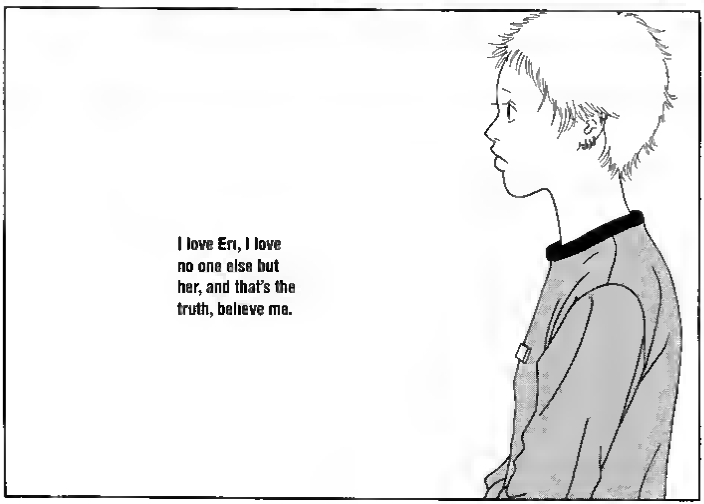

Chapter 9 - Secret Place

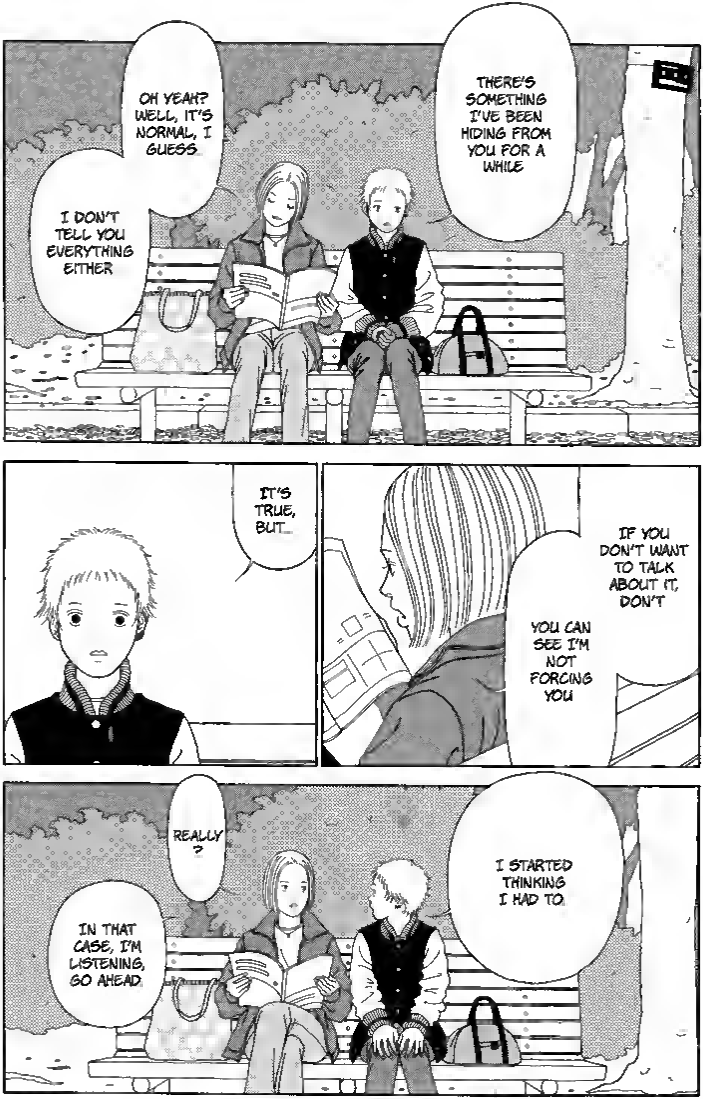
Hello, it's Ichiko. . Yeah, let's say I'm doing well...
It's springtime, us students are on break, and I'm heading over to work now.

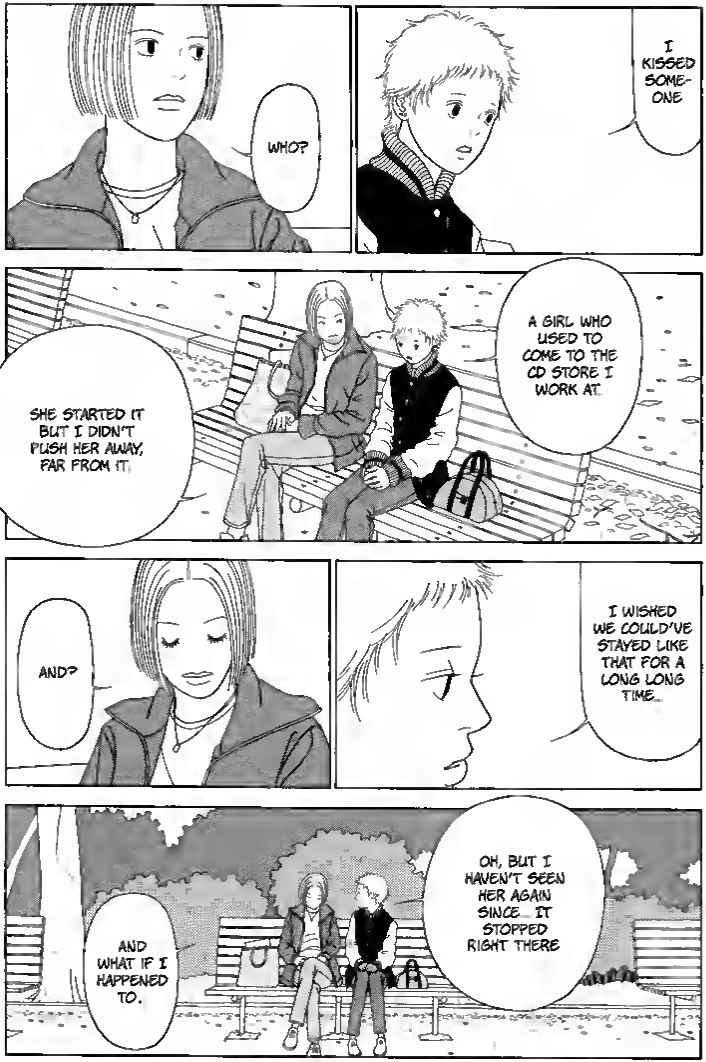

Once in the store, a thought occurs to me.
Not the desire to meet the skinhead girl—no, certainly not that.


I just wonder what's up with her, that's all.

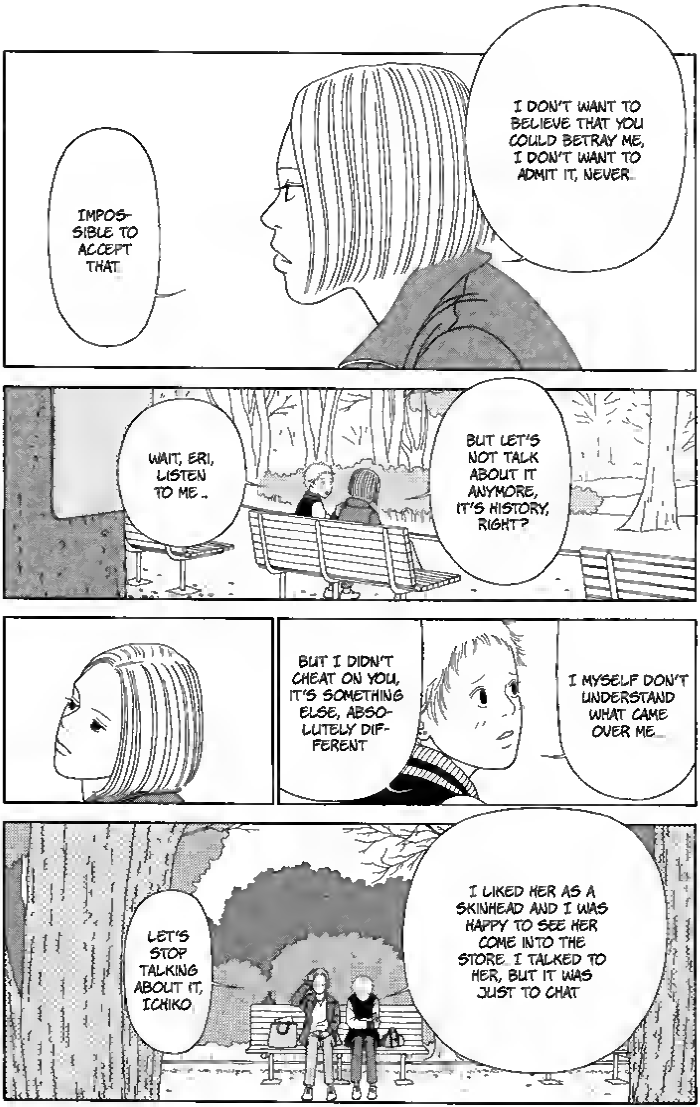

Each time, I think: "You have to confess to Eri once and for all."
But I still haven't done so.

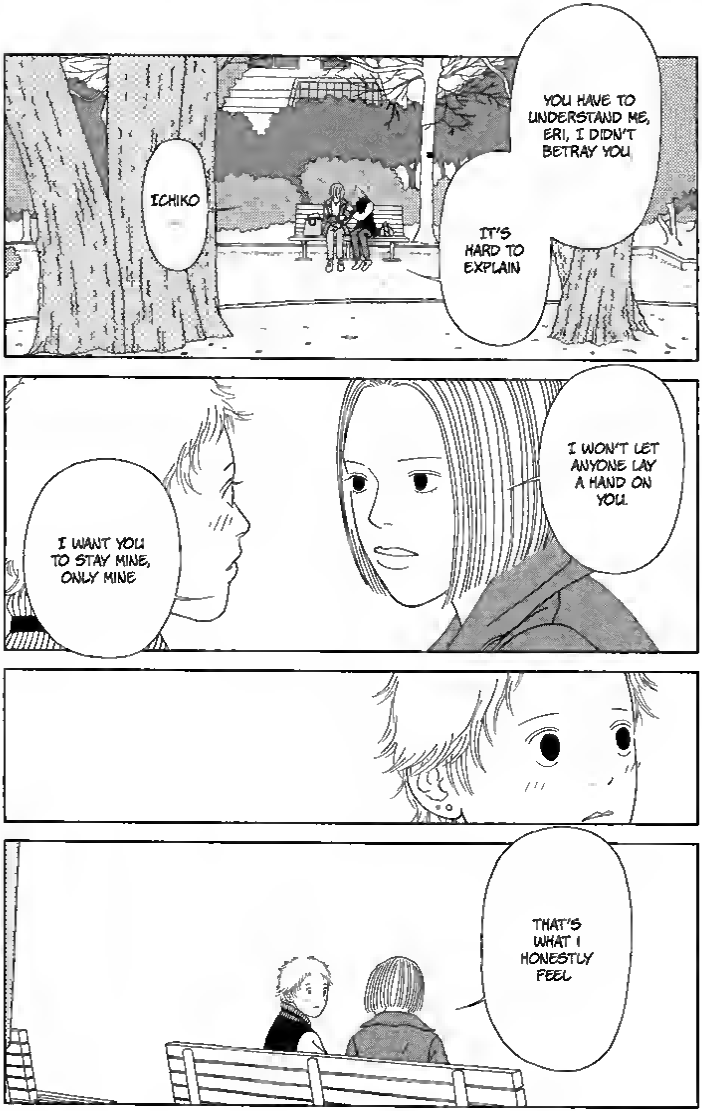

I love Eri, I love no one else but her, and that's the truth, believe me.

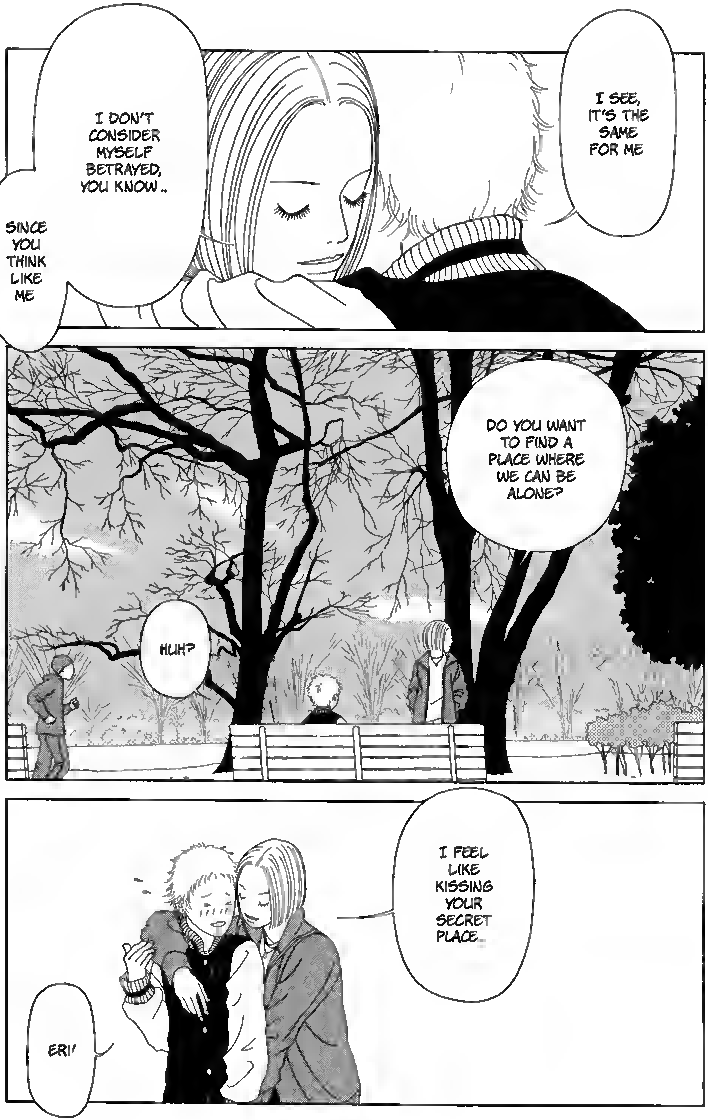

THERE'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN HIDING FROM YOU FOR A WHILE
OH YEAH? WELL, IT'S NORMAL, I GUESS.
I DON'T TELL YOU EVERYTHING EITHER
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, DON'T
YOU CAN SEE I'M NOT FORCING YOU
IT'S TRUE, BUT...
I STARTED THINKING I HAD TO.
REALLY ?
IN THAT CASE, I'M LISTENING, GO AHEAD.


WHO?
I KISSED SOME-ONE
A GIRL WHO USED TO COME TO THE CD STORE I WORK AT.
SHE STARTED IT BUT I DIDN'T PUSH HER AWAY, FAR FROM IT.
AND?
I WISHED WE COULD'VE STAYED LIKE THAT FOR A LONG LONG TIME...
AND WHAT IF I HAPPENED TO.
OH, BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN HER AGAIN SINCE... IT STOPPED RIGHT THERE

SHE'S AN INCREDIBLE WOMAN WHO KISSES AMAZINGLY WELL
HUH?
KISS SOMEONE WITHOUT YOU KNOWING?
EVEN THOUGH I DON'T FEEL LIKE LEADING A DOUBLE LIFE..
ERI, THAT'S JUST HYPOTHETICAL, RIGHT?
WHAT DO YOU FEEL, ICHIKO?
IT'S NOT TRUE, IS IT?
OH NO.
IT'S THE SAME FOR ME, ICHIKO
I DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE IT, I CAN'T ACCEPT IT THAT YOU'D..


I DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE THAT YOU COULD BETRAY ME, I DON'T WANT TO ADMIT IT, NEVER.
IMPOS-SIBLE TO ACCEPT THAT.
WAIT, ERI, LISTEN TO ME..
BUT LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT IT ANYMORE, IT'S HISTORY, RIGHT?
BUT I DIDN'T CHEAT ON YOU, IT'S SOMETHING ELSE, ABSO-LUTELY DIF-FERENT
I MYSELF DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT CAME OVER ME...
LET'S STOP TALKING ABOUT IT, ICHIKO.
I LIKED HER AS A SKINHEAD AND I WAS HAPPY TO SEE HER COME INTO THE STORE. I TALKED TO HER, BUT IT WAS JUST TO CHAT


ICHIKO
IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND ME, ERI, I DIDN'T BETRAY YOU
I WANT YOU TO STAY MINE, ONLY MINE
I WON'T LET ANYONE LAY A HAND ON YOU.
THAT'S WHAT I HONESTLY FEEL


I SEE, IT'S THE SAME FOR ME
I DON'T CONSIDER MYSELF BETRAYED, YOU KNOW..
SINCE YOU THINK LIKE ME
DO YOU WANT TO FIND A PLACE WHERE WE CAN BE ALONE?
HUH?
I FEEL LIKE KISSING YOUR SECRET PLACE..
ERI!

The thorn that was constantly pricking me is gone, and the pain has quieted down. It'll disappear completely with time.
I'm certain of it.
TAKE-CHAN!
AH!
OH? ICHIKO?
NO, I'M ON MY WAY BACK ACTUALLY.
ARE YOU OFF TO WORK?

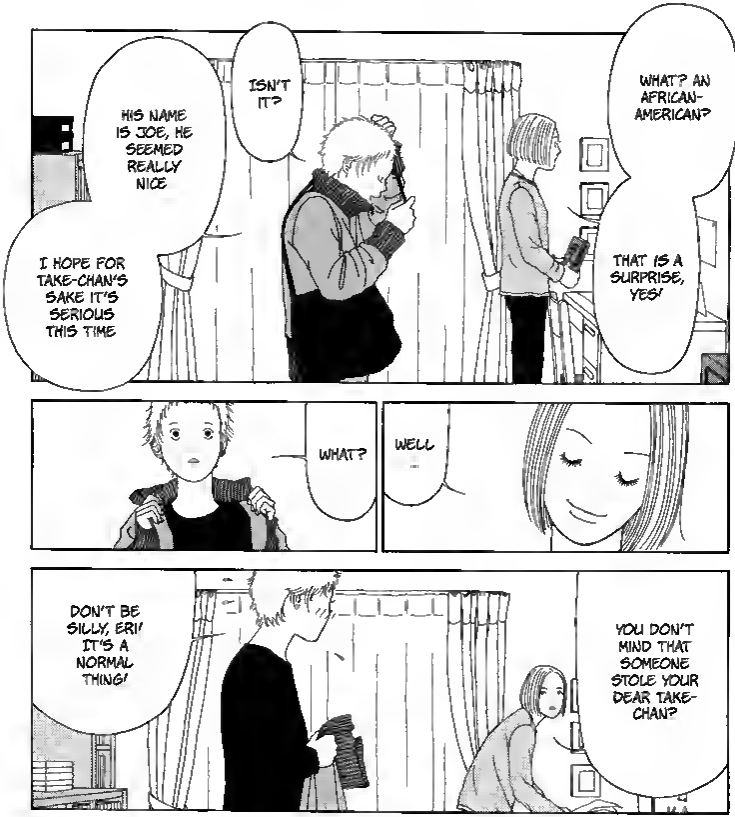
She is my best friend, Ichiko.
Take
Who is she?
Nice to meet you, Joe!
Nice to meet you, Ichiko!
My name is Joe!
CHILDISH! WHAT'S HER AGE?
TAKE'S BEST FRIEND?
REALLY? IS THAT RIGHT!?
MY BRAND NEW BOY-FRIEND...
Hey, Take
Hurry up! We'll be late!
THANKS, ICHIKO I'M SO HAPPY!
WOW!
WELL DONE, TAKE-CHAN! CONGRATU-LATIONS!

Have a nice day!
See you, Ichiko!
LET'S CALL EACH OTHER ONE OF THESE DAYS!
Yet to everyone else, the two of them just looked like friends enjoying a walk down the street.
It was my first time seeing Take-chan with a boyfriend...
HOW DID THEY MEET?
AH! WHAT A SURPRISE!
Ah?

I mistook her
for someone
else...

I had mistaken who she was.

Thank goodness...


WHAT? AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN?
ISN'T IT?
HIS NAME IS JOE, HE SEEMED REALLY NICE
I HOPE FOR TAKE-CHAN'S SAKE IT'S SERIOUS THIS TIME
THAT IS A SURPRISE, YES!
WHAT?
WELL...
DON'T BE SILLY, ERI! IT'S A NORMAL THING!
YOU DON'T MIND THAT SOMEONE STOLE YOUR DEAR TAKE-CHAN?

OH YES?
POOR TAKE-CHAN!
IN FACT, JOE IS WAY COOLER THAN TAKE-CHAN IF YOU ASK ME.
AH...
AH...

The girl with the skinhead...

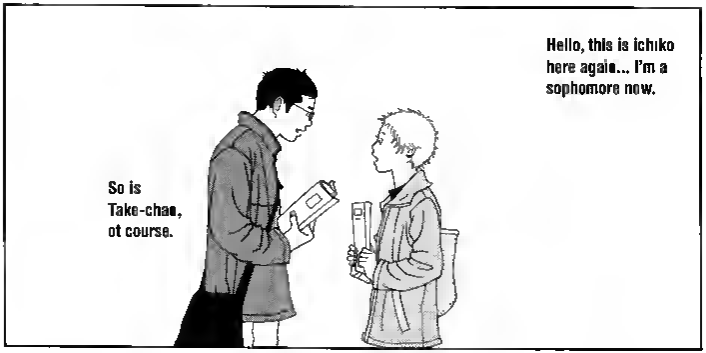
appeared to me in a dream.

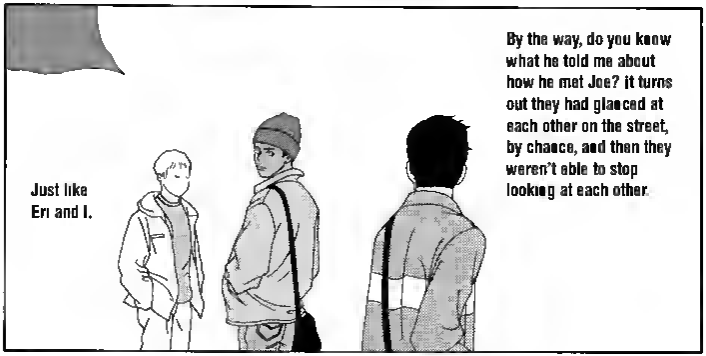
I read somewhere that seeing an old love in a dream is proof that the connection is broken

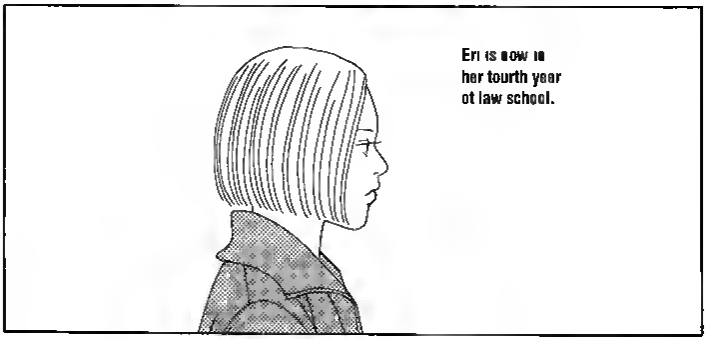
She was nothing for me, I won't look for her anymore. Neither in the street, nor in the crowd...

nor in my memories.

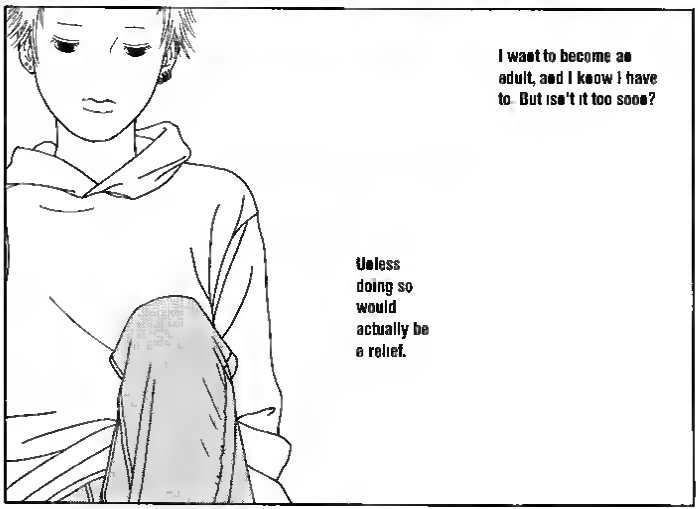
Chapter 10 - Past-Present-Future


Hello, this is Ichiko here again... I'm a sophomore now.
So is Take-chan, of course.


By the way, do you know what he told me about how he met Joe? It turns out they had glanced at each other on the street, by chance, and then they weren't able to stop looking at each other.
Just like Eri and I.

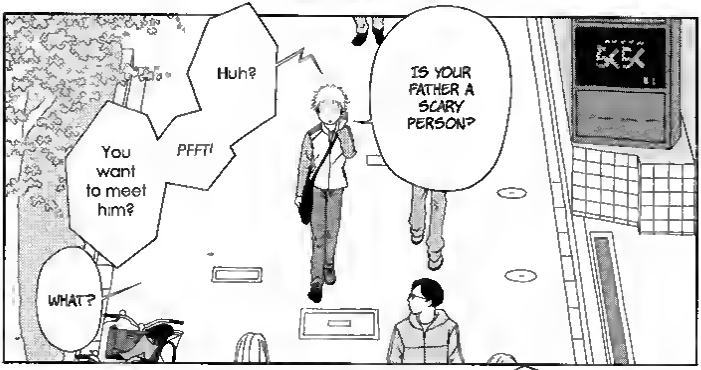

Eri is now in her fourth year of law school.

She continues to see me, but my heart beats each and every second at the thought of hearing her approach the subject...



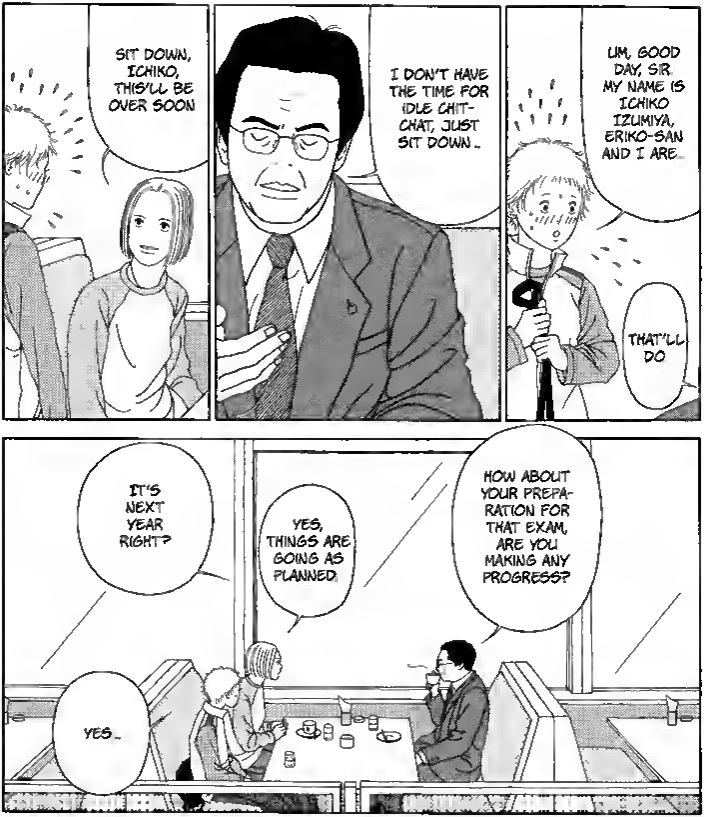
RRRRR
RRRRR
HELLO ?
OH, ERI! WHAT'S UP?
Where are you?
I'M JUST WALKING UP TO THE MOVIE THEATRE.
Oh really? I'm sorry, can you wait for me a little while somewhere?
Ichiko. I'm sorry buf my father just called me, he wants to meet me right now
WHAT !?
MODE
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN YOUR FATHER IN A LONG TIME, RIGHT? YOU MUST HAVE A LOT TO SAY TO EACH OTHER.
ERI, YOUR PARENTS DON'T LIVE THAT FAR AWAY AND YET YOU NEVER GO TO SEE THEM..
I think I'll be free in half an hour
HUH? BUT, ERI..

But it's true... You judge people by your father, Izumiya-sensei...
PFFT!
If you only knew him!

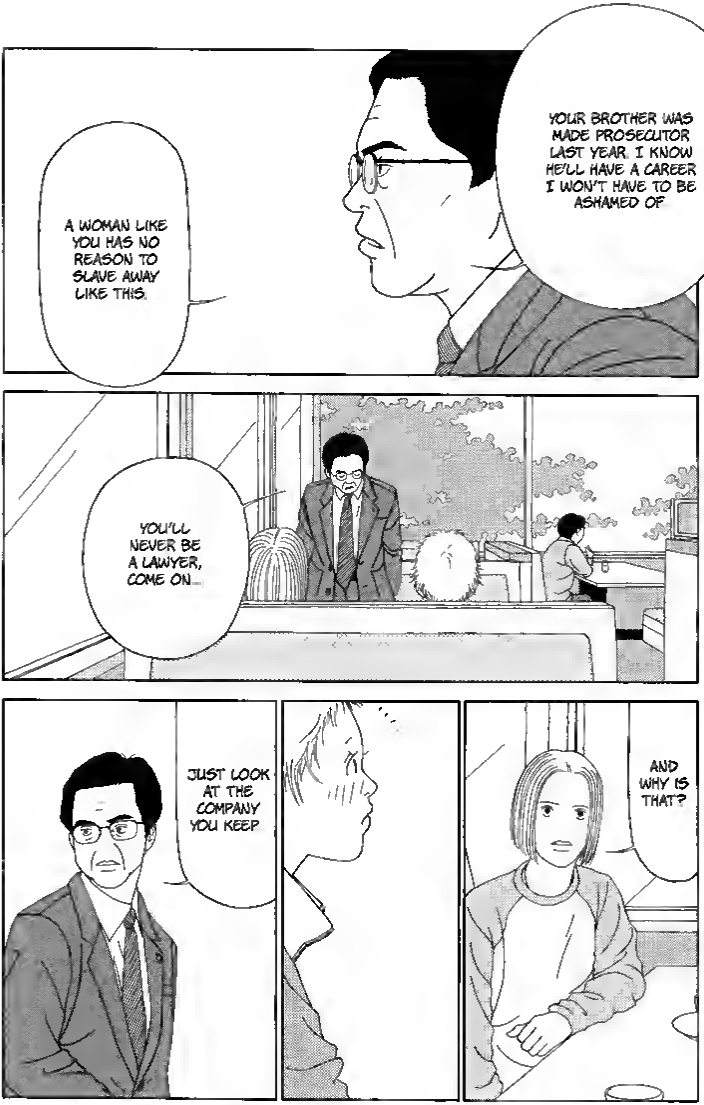

Huh?
IS YOUR FATHER A SCARY PERSON?
You want to meet him?
PFFT!
WHAT?

Heck, why not. Do you want to come?
It'd be good for you to meet someone like him once...
Agreed? OK, here's where we are...

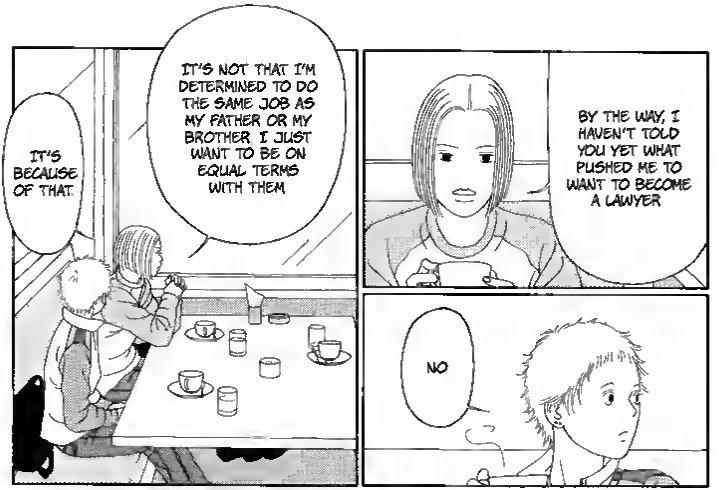
When I arrived, Eri and her father were just starting to talk.


SIT DOWN, ICHIKO, THIS'LL BE OVER SOON
I DON'T HAVE THE TIME FOR IDLE CHIT-CHAT, JUST SIT DOWN.
UM, GOOD DAY, SIR. MY NAME IS ICHIKO IZUMIYA, ERIKO-SAN AND I ARE...
THAT'LL DO
IT'S NEXT YEAR RIGHT?
YES, THINGS ARE GOING AS PLANNED.
HOW ABOUT YOUR PREPARATION FOR THAT EXAM, ARE YOU MAKING ANY PROGRESS?
YES...

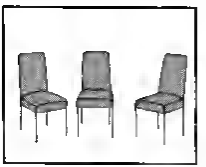
THE DIPLOMA'S NOT A PROBLEM AND MY DISSERTATION IS PERFECT.
ARE YOU SURE YOU'LL RECEIVE YOUR DIPLOMA? AND YOUR DISSERTATION?
LISTEN CAREFULLY I WON'T ACCEPT YOUR REPEATING A CLASS IF IT HAPPENS, I'LL CUT YOUR ALLOWANCE.
I'VE ALWAYS PASSED MY EXAMS THE FIRST TIME AROUND, AND SO HAS YOUR BROTHER
SOMEONE WHO TRIPS ON THE FIRST STEP DOESN'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES
I WILL ADD THAT YOU ARE A GIRL.
THERE'S NO REASON FOR YOU TO PUSH YOURSELF TO PASS THE BAR EXAM THIS WAY


A WOMAN LIKE YOU HAS NO REASON TO SLAVE AWAY LIKE THIS.
YOUR BROTHER WAS MADE PROSECUTOR LAST YEAR. I KNOW HE'LL HAVE A CAREER I WON'T HAVE TO BE ASHAMED OF.
YOU'LL NEVER BE A LAWYER, COME ON...
JUST LOOK AT THE COMPANY YOU KEEP.
AND WHY IS THAT?

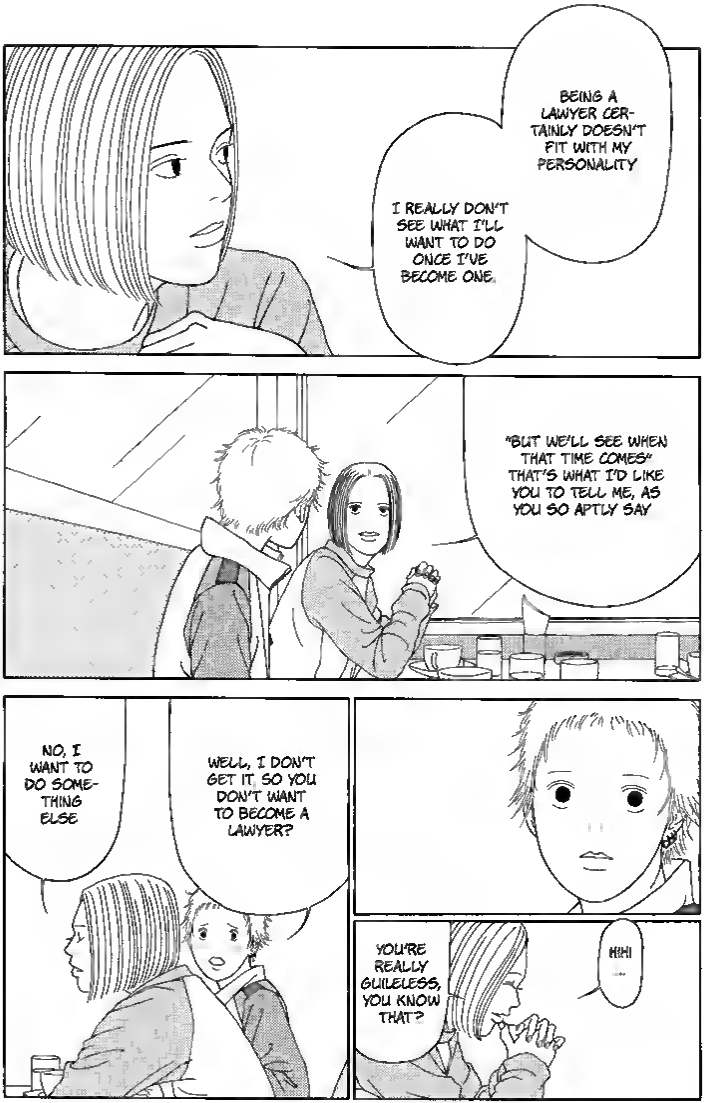
The meeting between Eri and her father did in fact end within thirty minutes.

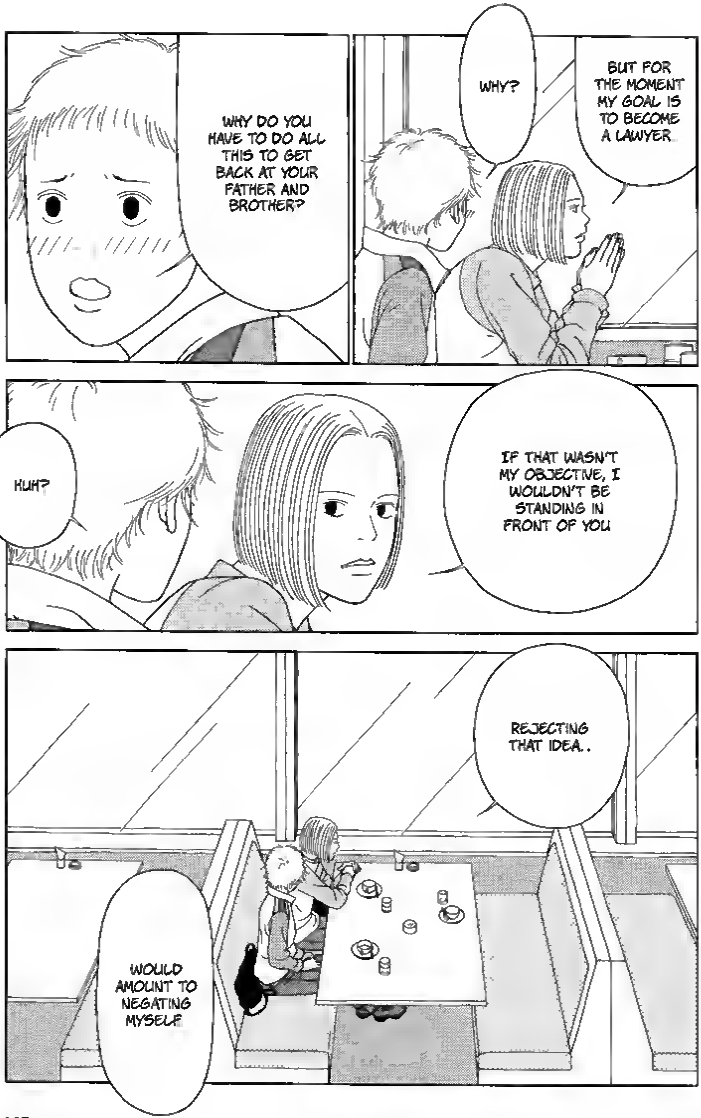

IT'S BECAUSE OF THAT
IT'S NOT THAT I'M DETERMINED TO DO THE SAME JOB AS MY FATHER OR MY BROTHER. I JUST WANT TO BE ON EQUAL TERMS WITH THEM
BY THE WAY, I HAVEN'T TOLD YOU YET WHAT PUSHED ME TO WANT TO BECOME A LAWYER
NO

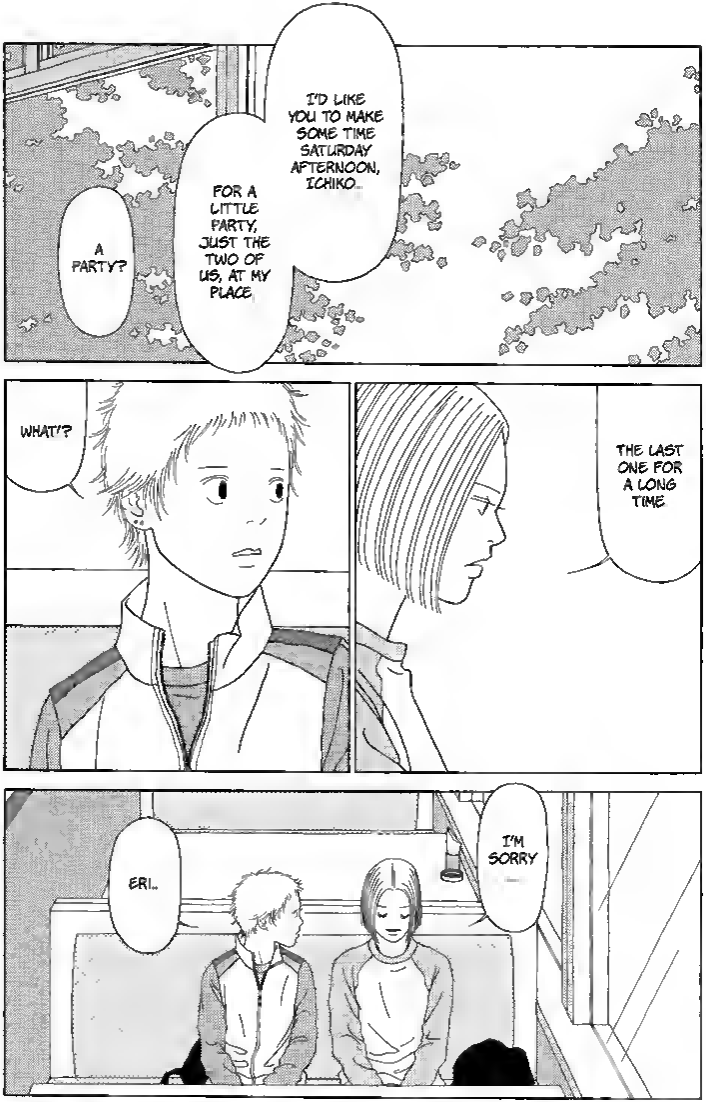
I can get to your level.

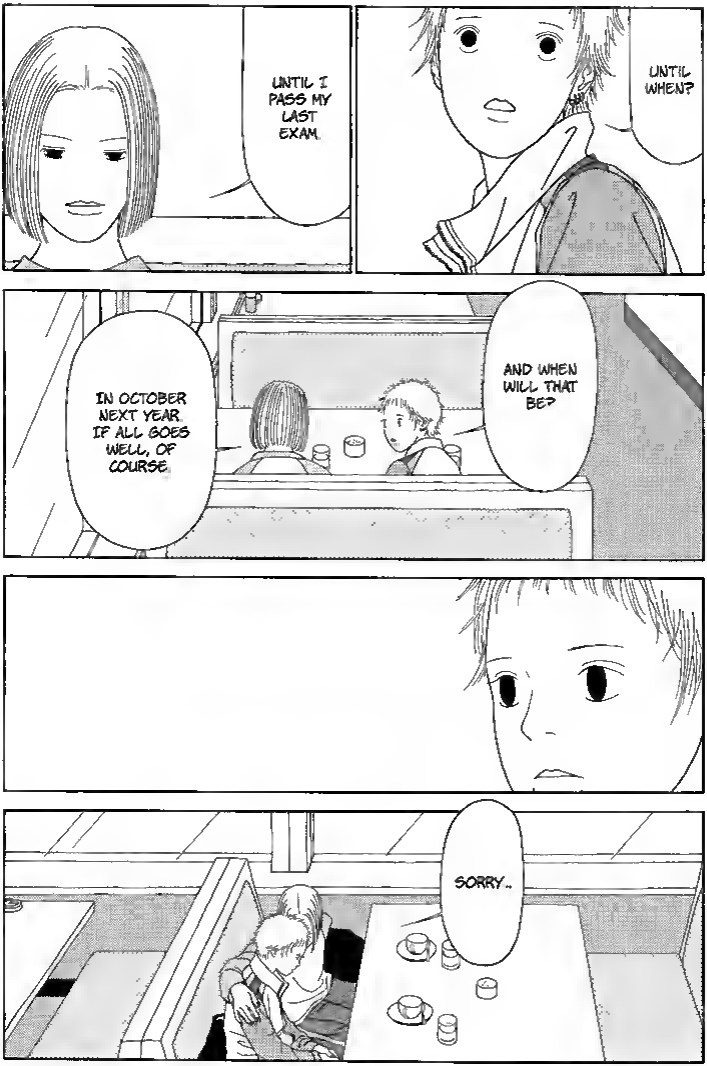


You see, I can do it too.

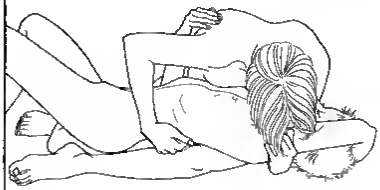

BEING A LAWYER CERTAINLY DOESN'T FIT WITH MY PERSONALITY
I REALLY DON'T SEE WHAT I'LL WANT TO DO ONCE I'VE BECOME ONE.
"BUT WE'LL SEE WHEN THAT TIME COMES" THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE YOU TO TELL ME, AS YOU SO APTLY SAY
NO, I WANT TO DO SOMETHING ELSE
WELL, I DON'T GET IT. SO YOU DON'T WANT TO BECOME A LAWYER?
HIHI ...
YOU'RE REALLY GUILELESS, YOU KNOW THAT?


WHY DO YOU HAVE TO DO ALL THIS TO GET BACK AT YOUR FATHER AND BROTHER?
WHY?
BUT FOR THE MOMENT MY GOAL IS TO BECOME A LAWYER
KUH?
IF THAT WASN'T MY OBJECTIVE, I WOULDN'T BE STANDING IN FRONT OF YOU
WOULD AMOUNT TO NEGATING MYSELF
REJECTING THAT IDEA..

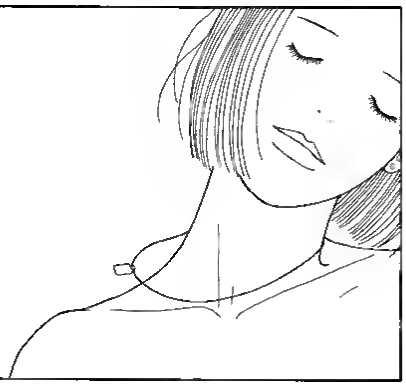

I'D LIKE YOU TO MAKE SOME TIME SATURDAY AFTERNOON, ICHIKO...
FOR A LITTLE PARTY, JUST THE TWO OF US, AT MY PLACE.
A PARTY?
WHAT!?
THE LAST ONE FOR A LONG TIME
ERI...
I'M SORRY


UNTIL I PASS MY LAST EXAM.
UNTIL WHEN?
IN OCTOBER NEXT YEAR IF ALL GOES WELL, OF COURSE.
AND WHEN WILL THAT BE?
SORRY..

Saturday came around immediately We couldn't do anything but get undressed and caress each other

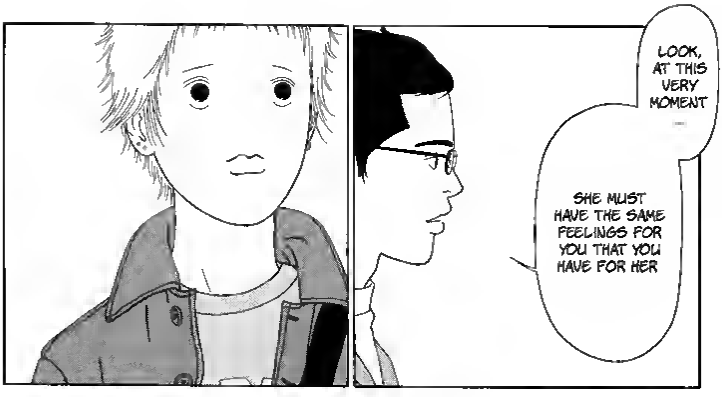


After that time, the scent of her skin, her touch...



vanished completely

CHEER UP, ICHIKO!
HUH? I'M DOING FINE, REALLY
NO KIDDING ..
DO YOU WANT TO COME DANCING, WITH JOE AND ME? OR GO OUT TO EAT?
OH NO!
I'D FEEL LIKE A SPARE WHEEL BETWEEN YOU TWO!
ICHIKO ...
ERI DIDN'T GO THAT FAR, SHE'S REALLY CLOSE ..

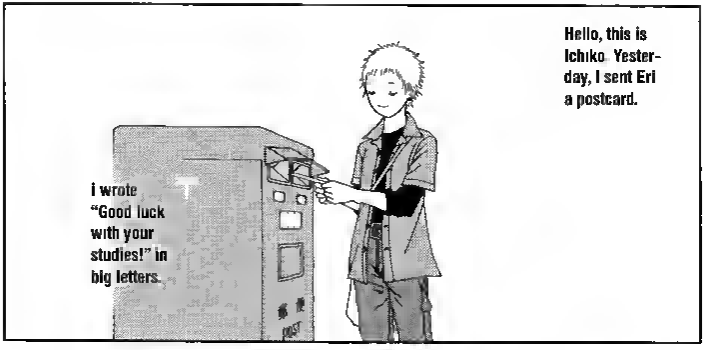


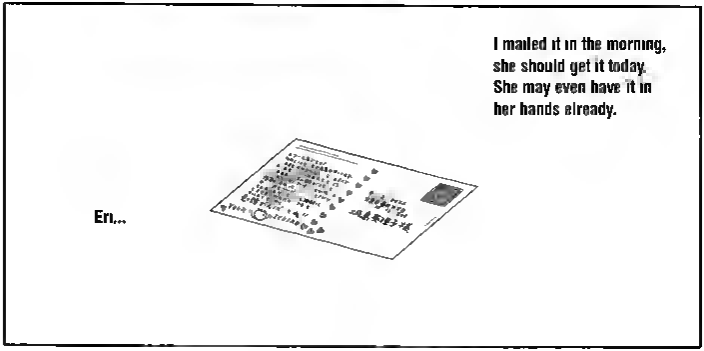
I'll soon get used to it. After all, it isn't like we broke up. All I need to do to see her is go to her place. I just need to call her for her to answer.

Eri...

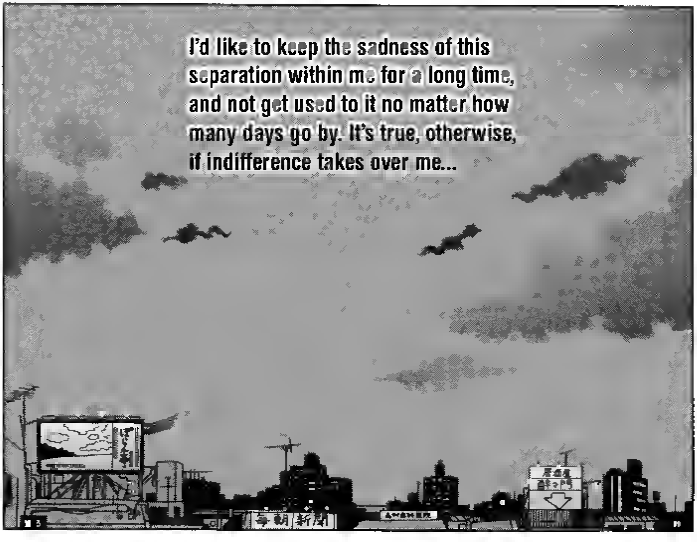
That's what I keep telling myself.

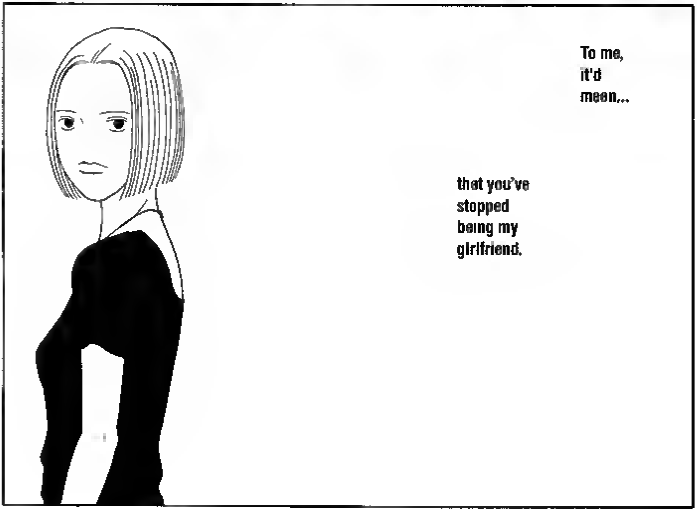
Chapter 11 - Miss You


Hello, this is Ichiko. Yesterday, I sent Eri a postcard.
I wrote "Good luck with your studies!" in big letters.


I mailed it in the morning, she should get it today. She may even have it in her hands already.
Eri...

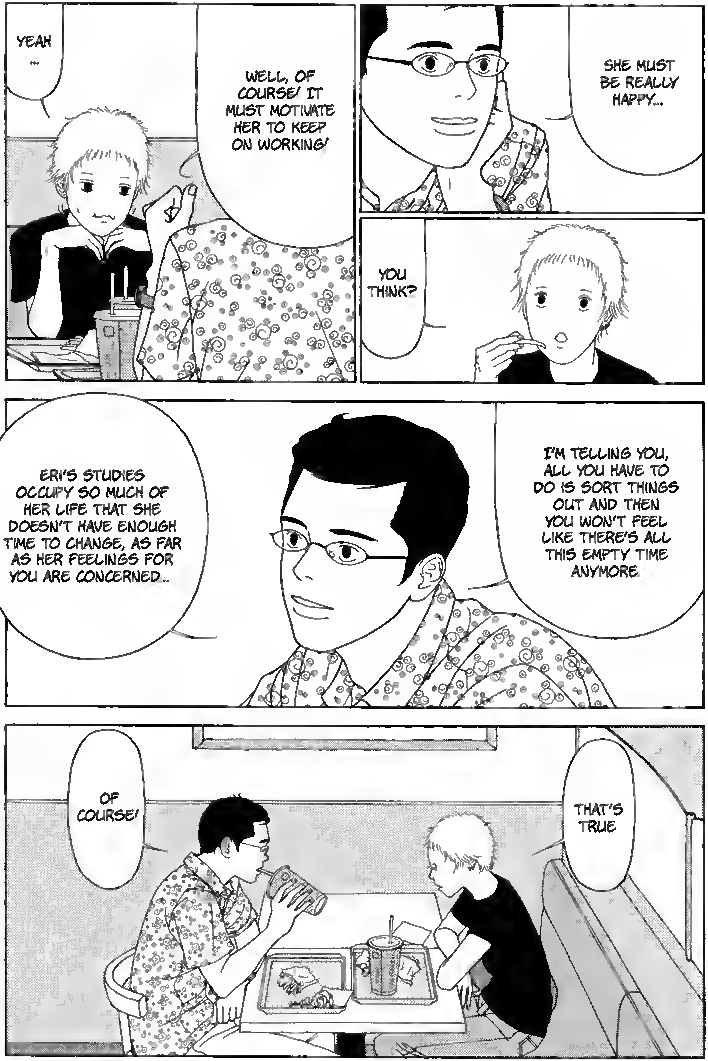
You'll allow me that, at least, huh? It shouldn't disturb you in your work.


I'd like to keep the sadness of this separation within me for a long time, and not get used to it no matter how many days go by. It's true, otherwise, if indifference takes over me...

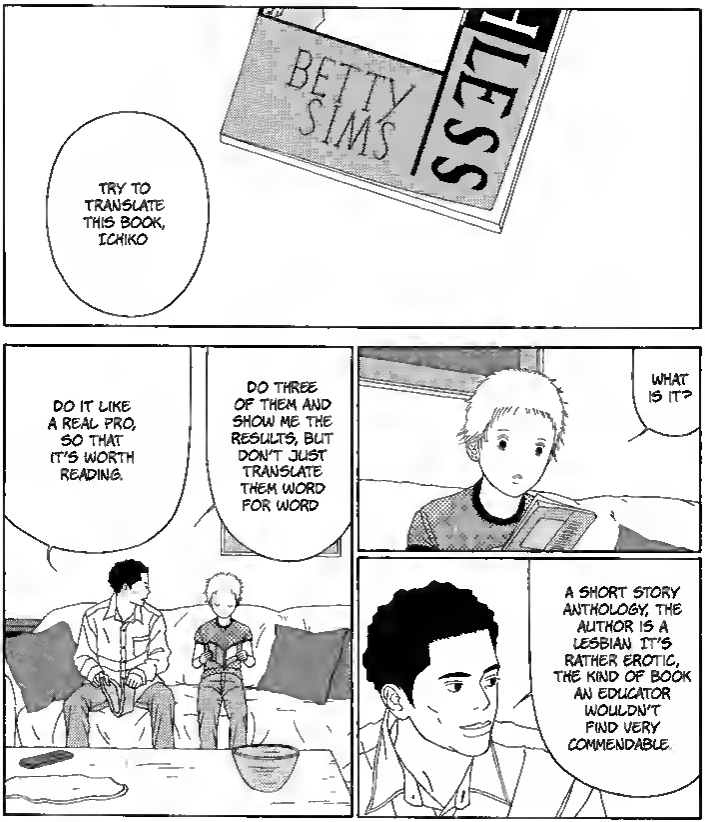

To me, it'd mean...
that you've stopped being my girlfriend.

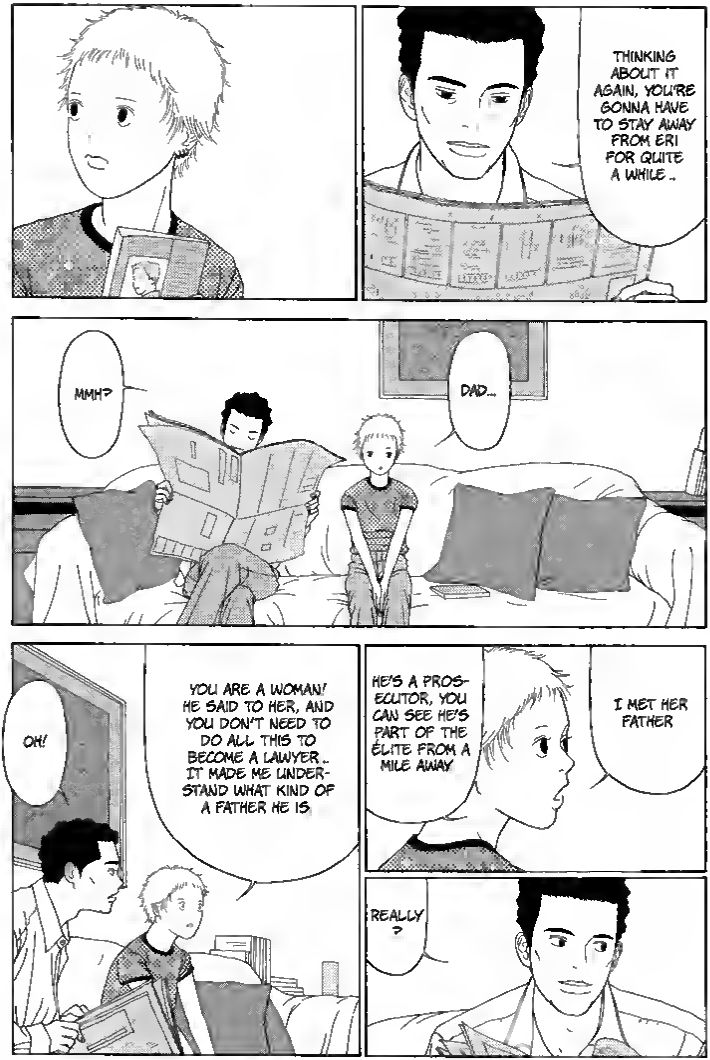
I PREFER POST-CARDS THEY'RE HANDWRITTEN, IT'S MORE PERSONAL.
AND IT REALLY MAKES YOU HAPPY TO FEEL THE OTHER'S SENSE WHEN YOU SEE THE PICTURE OR THE PHOTO HE CHOSE
I'M DYING TO EMAIL HER ANY CHANCE I GET, TO HAVE HER REPLY IMMEDIATELY, EVEN IF IT'S JUST ONE WORD.
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH
NO KIDDING! I FIND THAT QUITE EROTIC!
INTER-TWINED.
SHE SENT ME ONE WITH TWO WHITE PILLOWS SIDE BY SIDE, DECORATED WITH CLIMBING ROSES.
HUH?
LIMM, NOTHING SPECIAL...
La Nuit
EXCUSE ME? WHAT ARE YOU IMAGINING! IT'S A REALLY CUTE PICTURE!
GOOD OLD TAKE-CHAN, WHAT DOES IT MAKE YOU THINK OF, HUH?
© Kathryn Kigman

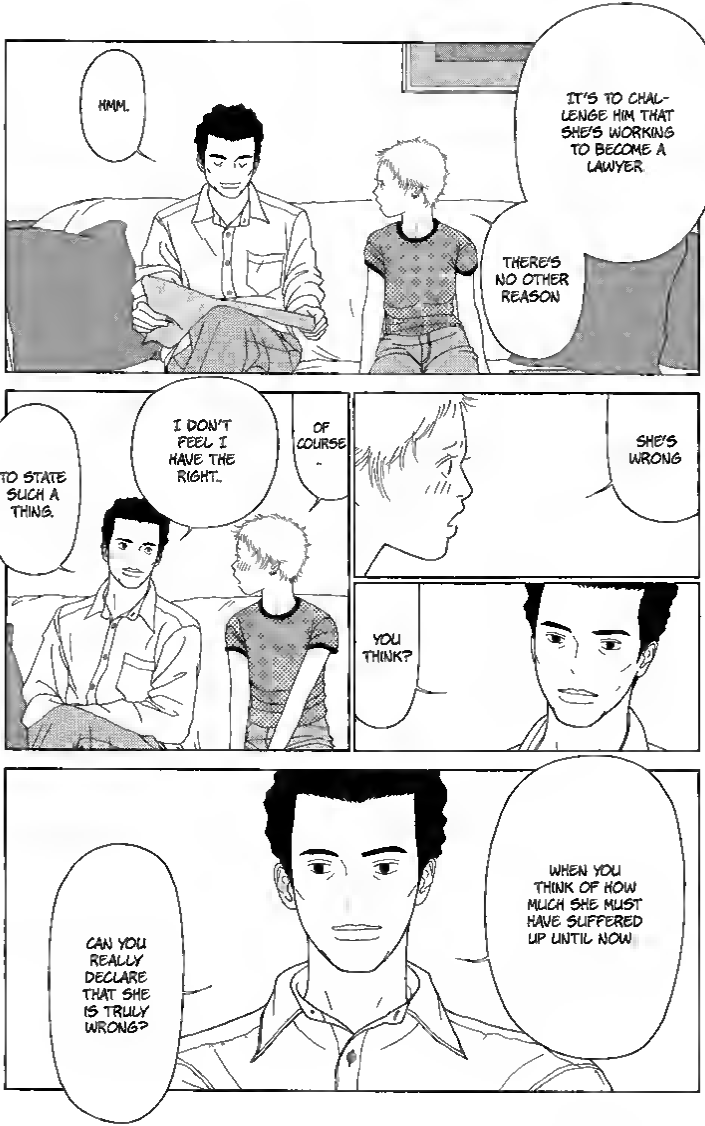
Pillows. "The Night" or "At Night"


YEAH ...
WELL, OF COURSE! IT MUST MOTIVATE HER TO KEEP ON WORKING!
SHE MUST BE REALLY HAPPY...
YOU THINK?
ERI'S STUDIES OCCUPY SO MUCH OF HER LIFE THAT SHE DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO CHANGE, AS FAR AS HER FEELINGS FOR YOU ARE CONCERNED...
I'M TELLING YOU, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS SORT THINGS OUT AND THEN YOU WON'T FEEL LIKE THERE'S ALL THIS EMPTY TIME ANYMORE
OF COURSE!
THAT'S TRUE

Actually, I wouldn't bet on it. Because in reality, there is no void, each of our schedules is quite full, In its own way


BETTY SIMS
TRY TO TRANSLATE THIS BOOK, ICHIKO
DO IT LIKE A REAL PRO, SO THAT IT'S WORTH READING.
DO THREE OF THEM AND SHOW ME THE RESULTS, BUT DON'T JUST TRANSLATE THEM WORD FOR WORD
WHAT IS IT?
A SHORT STORY ANTHOLOGY, THE AUTHOR IS A LESBIAN IT'S RATHER EROTIC, THE KIND OF BOOK AN EDUCATOR WOULDN'T FIND VERY COMMENDABLE.


THINKING ABOUT IT AGAIN, YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO STAY AWAY FROM ERI FOR QUITE A WHILE..
DAD...
MMH?
I MET HER FATHER
HE'S A PROSECUTOR, YOU CAN SEE HE'S PART OF THE ÉLITE FROM A MILE AWAY
REALLY ?
YOU ARE A WOMAN! HE SAID TO HER, AND YOU DON'T NEED TO DO ALL THIS TO BECOME A LAWYER.. IT MADE ME UNDERSTAND WHAT KIND OF A FATHER HE IS
OH!


HMM.
IT'S TO CHALLENGE HIM THAT SHE'S WORKING TO BECOME A LAWYER.
THERE'S NO OTHER REASON
TO STATE SUCH A THING.
I DON'T FEEL I HAVE THE RIGHT..
OF COURSE..
SHE'S WRONG
YOU THINK?
CAN YOU REALLY DECLARE THAT SHE IS TRULY WRONG?
WHEN YOU THINK OF HOW MUCH SHE MUST HAVE SUFFERED UP UNTIL NOW

I KNOW I CAN'T SAY IT TO HER FACE EITHER
ALL I CAN DO IS WRITE TO HER AND SAY "GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR STUDIES!"
YOU KNOW
MY GIRL
DAD?
YOU'RE NO LONGER THE LITTLE ICHIKO WHO BELONGED ONLY ME

No answer from Eri.
Proof that she's getting down to work.
"OH BABY, I CANNOT WAIT..."
"OH BABY, I CANNOT WAIT..."*
ALL THEY TALK ABOUT IN THIS IS SEX, DAD!
HMM, HMM, THIS SOUNDS LIKE THEY'RE HAVING TELE-PHONE SEX.
yet. You know y
't that right?"
se. I'm very wet.
"PLEASE, I'M VERY WET..."*
"PLEASE, I'M VERY WET..."

* The italic text was originally spoken in English

From the nape of your neck,
it follows the curve of your
back, reaches your thighs.
Darling, open yourself up,
let me get to your well, the
place I long to enter.

My hand
slowly
goes down
your body

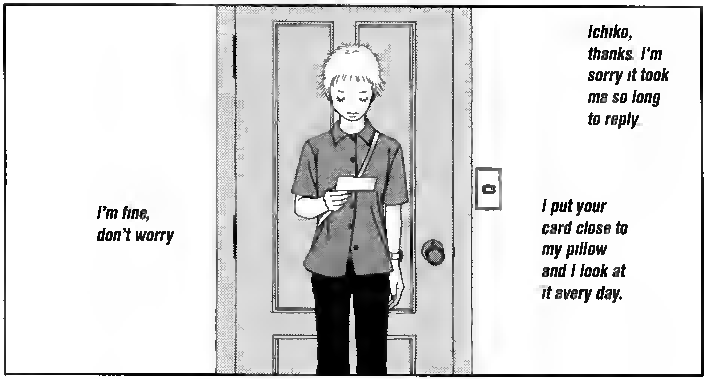
Yes, you're
burning,
dripping wet.

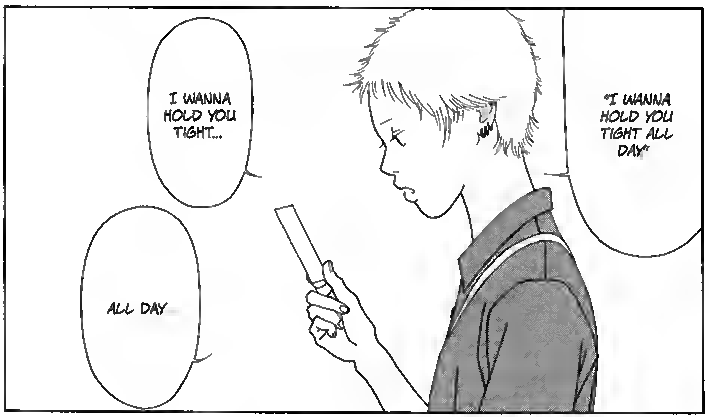
Ichiko

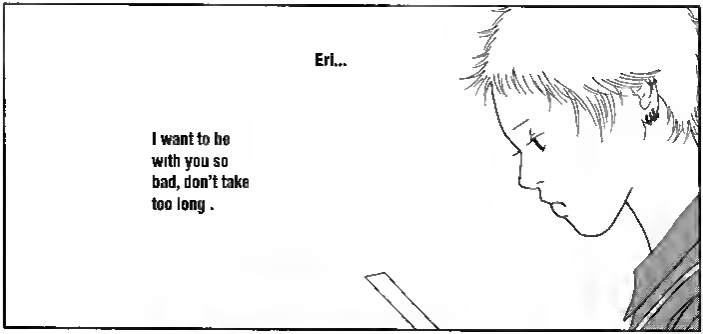
STOP IT, ICHIKO, YOU SHOULDN'T BE WAITING ON HER LIKE THIS
WHAT'S UP WITH ERI, I DIDN'T GET ANY ANSWER AT ALL..
SHE'LL LET YOU KNOW SHE'S ALIVE AT SOME POINT.
MMH..
YOU WROTE TO HER FINE BUT YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET AN ANSWER OTHERWISE YOU'LL JUST END UP DEPRESSED
I FEEL VERY STRONG.
ANYWAY, I'M REALLY HAPPY WITH YOU.

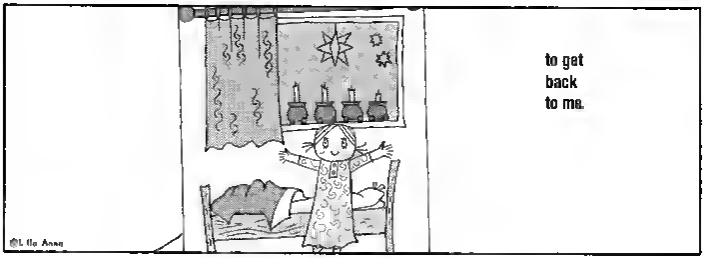
I REALIZE THE ROLES HAVE BEEN REVERSED, I'M NO LONGER THE ONE..
WHO'S GETTING COM-FORTED
LIFE IS AN UNPREDICTABLE THING...
YES, YOU'RE RIGHT..
BUT THAT'S HOW IT IS! AND MAYBE THINGS WON'T TURN OUT THE WAY YOU WANT 'EM TO
HUH?
EXPLAIN WHAT YOU MEAN?
WELL, IT MEANS..
WHAT IT MEANS
PUNCH

When I got home, I found Eri's reply


Ichiko, thanks. I'm sorry it took me so long to reply.
I'm fine, don't worry
I put your card close to my pillow and I look at it every day.

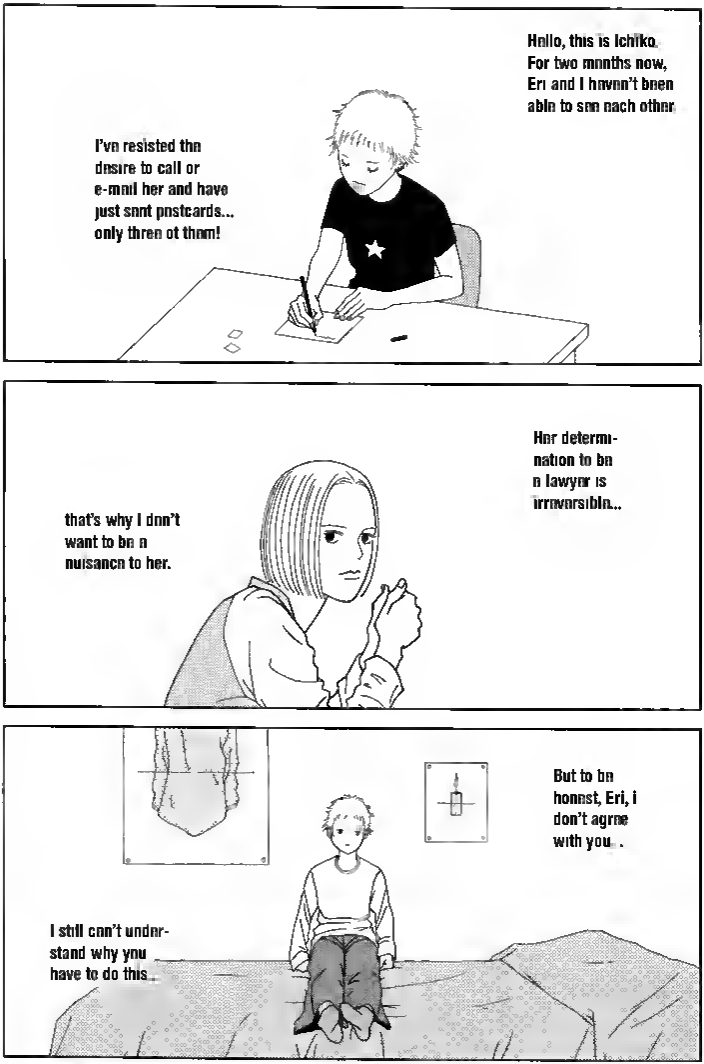



Eri...
I want to be with you so bad, don't take too long .

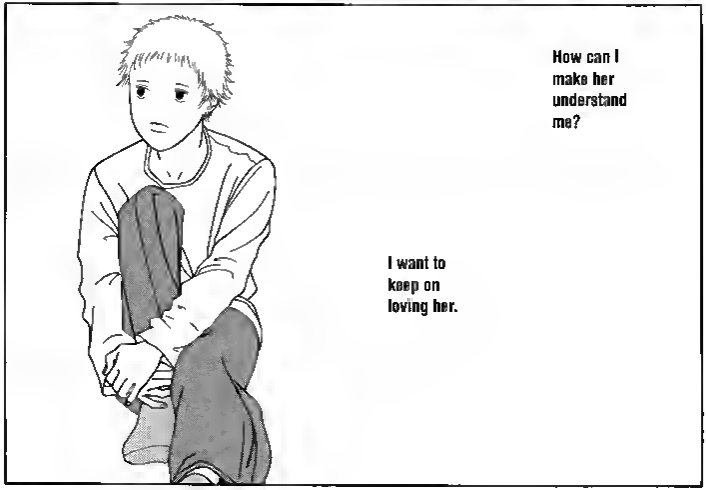

to get back to me.

Please, I cannot wait!

Chapter 12 - Sweet and Spicy

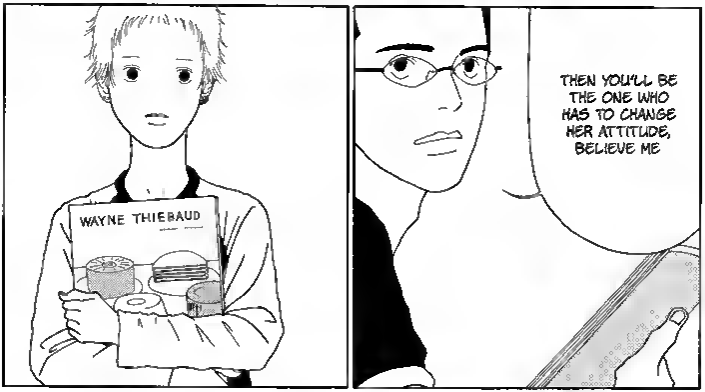

Hello, this is Ichiko. For two months now, Eri and I haven't been able to see each other.
I've resisted the desire to call or e-mail her and have just sent postcards... only three of them!
Her determination to be a lawyer is irreversible...
that's why I don't want to be a nuisance to her.
But to be honest, Eri, I don't agree with you...
I still can't understand why you have to do this...

If I called her I don't think I could contain myself. "Eri, if your life is based around getting back at someone else you aren't really living, you won't know happiness like that."

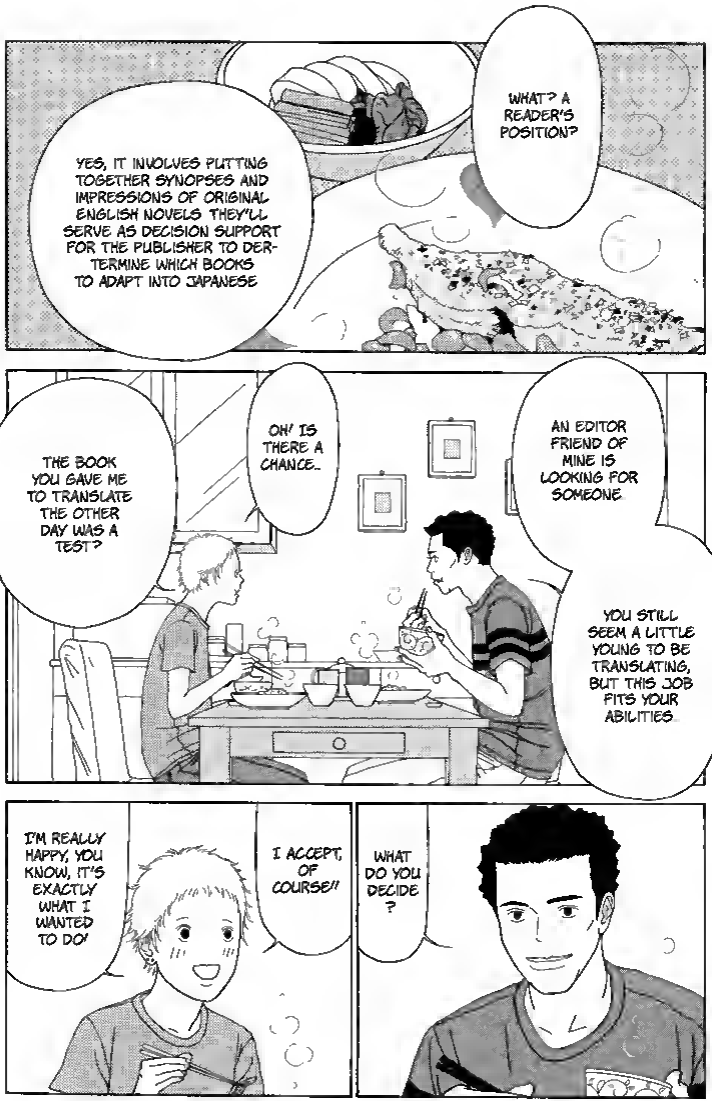


WHAT ?
THIS MIGHT SOUND A LITTLE HARSH, BUT...
IN MY OPINION IT'S A WHIM ON YOUR PART.
NOTHING SAYS SHE WON'T GET ATTACHED TO HER WORK.
IT'S TRUE THAT ERI'S PROBABLY ONE HUNDRED PERCENT MOTIVATED BY HER DESIRE TO PROVE HERSELF TO HER FATHER RIGHT NOW.
BUT WHEN SHE TRULY STARTS WORKING...
NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE HER THAT BOTHERS YOU, AND NOTHING ELSE.
IN OTHER WORDS, IT'S...
YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT.

THAT'S NOT TRUE!
YES, IT IS
IF YOU LOVE HER AND IF YOU WANT TO GO ON..


WAYNE THIEBAUD
THEN YOU'LL BE THE ONE WHO HAS TO CHANGE HER ATTITUDE, BELIEVE ME

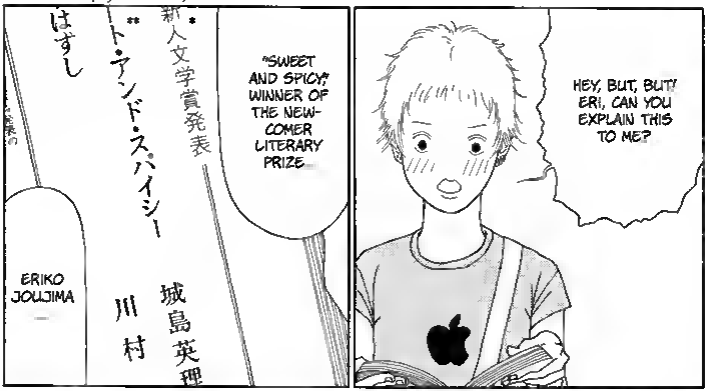
OTHERWISE, YOU'LL HAVE TO BREAK UP WITH HER
I DON'T SEE ANY OTHER SOLUTION.

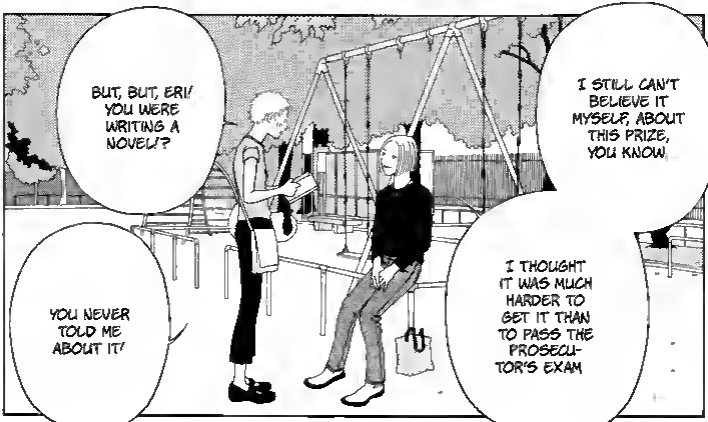

WHAT? A READER'S POSITION?
YES, IT INVOLVES PUTTING TOGETHER SYNOPSES AND IMPRESSIONS OF ORIGINAL ENGLISH NOVELS. THEY'LL SERVE AS DECISION SUPPORT FOR THE PUBLISHER TO DETERMINE WHICH BOOKS TO ADAPT INTO JAPANESE
AN EDITOR FRIEND OF MINE IS LOOKING FOR SOMEONE
OH! IS THERE A CHANCE..
THE BOOK YOU GAVE ME TO TRANSLATE THE OTHER DAY WAS A TEST?
YOU STILL SEEM A LITTLE YOUNG TO BE TRANSLATING, BUT THIS JOB FITS YOUR ABILITIES.
I ACCEPT, OF COURSE!!
I'M REALLY HAPPY, YOU KNOW, IT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED TO DO!
WHAT DO YOU DECIDE?

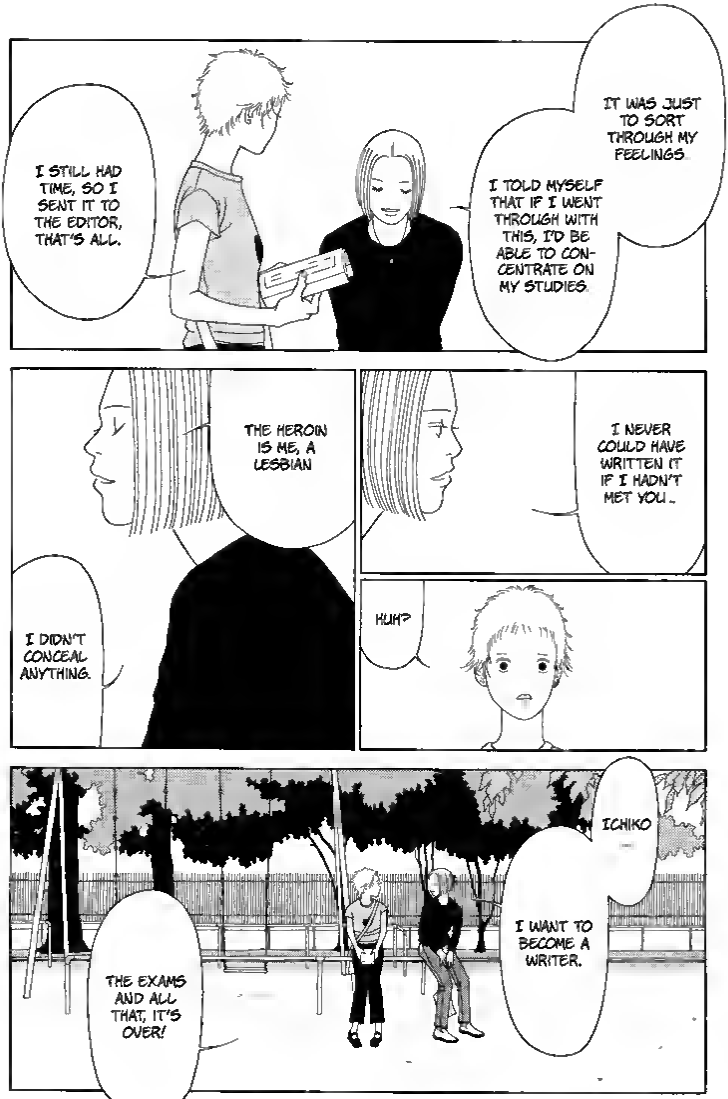
DAD.
IT'S TRUE, I ALSO HAVE TO START...
THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE FUTURE
IT MAY BE OVER, WITH ERI
YES?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

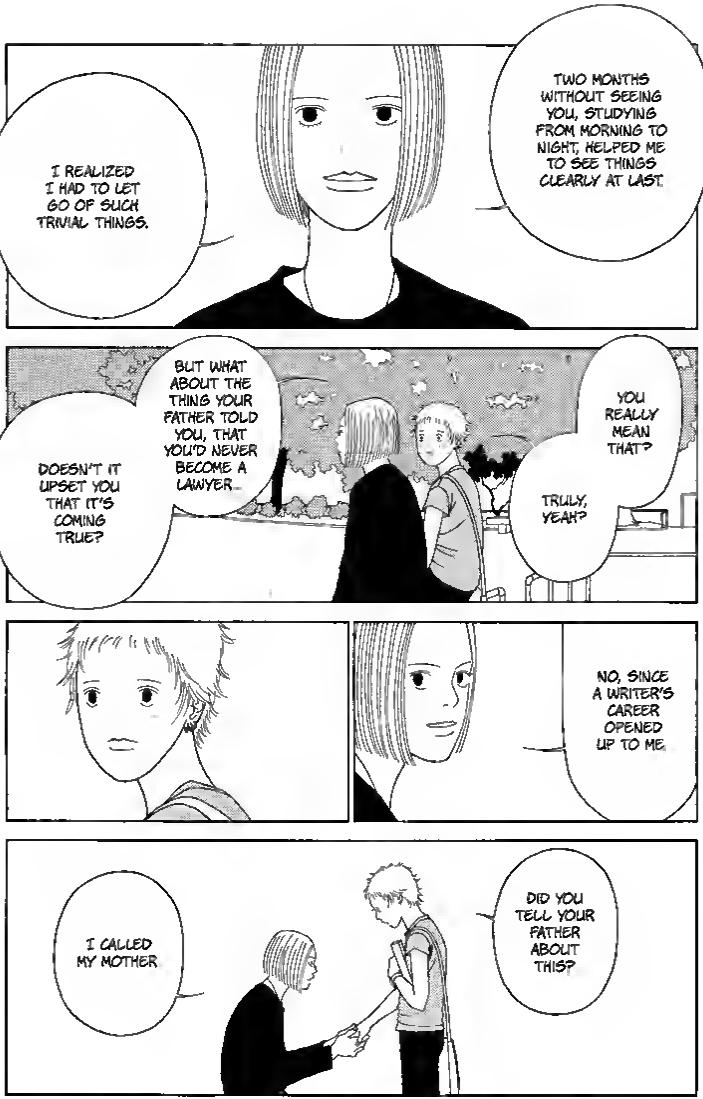
That's when
Eri called me,
out of the blue

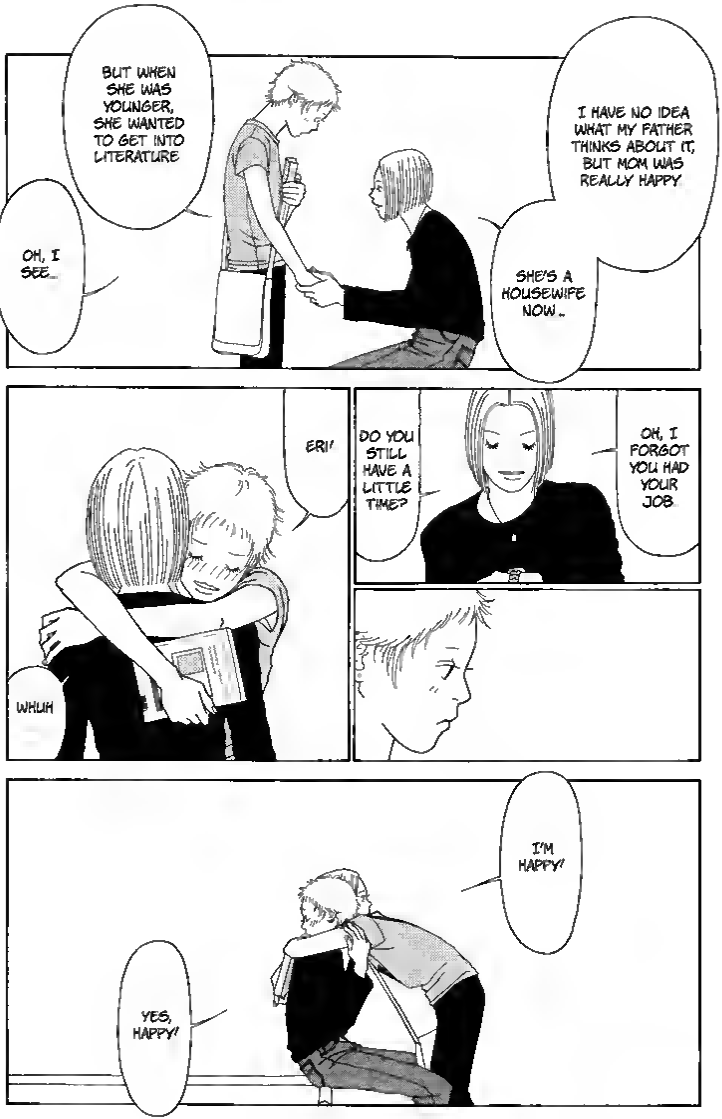
* Newcomer Literary Prize Announcement
** "Sweet and Spicy" -- Eriko Joujima




BUT, BUT, ERI! YOU WERE WRITING A NOVEL!?
I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT MYSELF, ABOUT THIS PRIZE, YOU KNOW.
YOU NEVER TOLD ME ABOUT IT!
I THOUGHT IT WAS MUCH HARDER TO GET IT THAN TO PASS THE PROSECUTOR'S EXAM


I STILL HAD TIME, SO I SENT IT TO THE EDITOR, THAT'S ALL.
IT WAS JUST TO SORT THROUGH MY FEELINGS.
I TOLD MYSELF THAT IF I WENT THROUGH WITH THIS, I'D BE ABLE TO CONCENTRATE ON MY STUDIES.
THE HEROIN IS ME, A LESBIAN
I DIDN'T CONCEAL ANYTHING.
I NEVER COULD HAVE WRITTEN IT IF I HADN'T MET YOU...
HUH?
ICHIKO
I WANT TO BECOME A WRITER.
THE EXAMS AND ALL THAT, IT'S OVER!

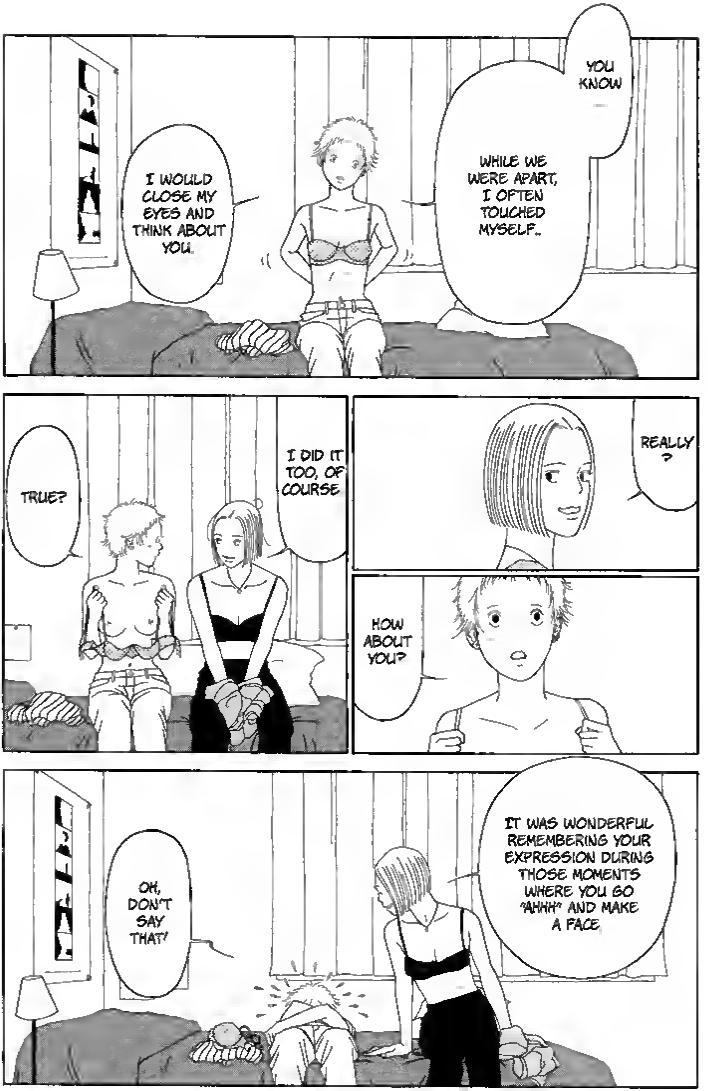

I REALIZED I HAD TO LET GO OF SUCH TRIVIAL THINGS.
TWO MONTHS WITHOUT SEEING YOU, STUDYING FROM MORNING TO NIGHT, HELPED ME TO SEE THINGS CLEARLY AT LAST.
DOESN'T IT UPSET YOU THAT IT'S COMING TRUE?
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE THING YOUR FATHER TOLD YOU, THAT YOU'D NEVER BECOME A LAWYER...
TRULY, YEAH?
YOU REALLY MEAN THAT?
NO, SINCE A WRITER'S CAREER OPENED UP TO ME.
I CALLED MY MOTHER.
DID YOU TELL YOUR FATHER ABOUT THIS?

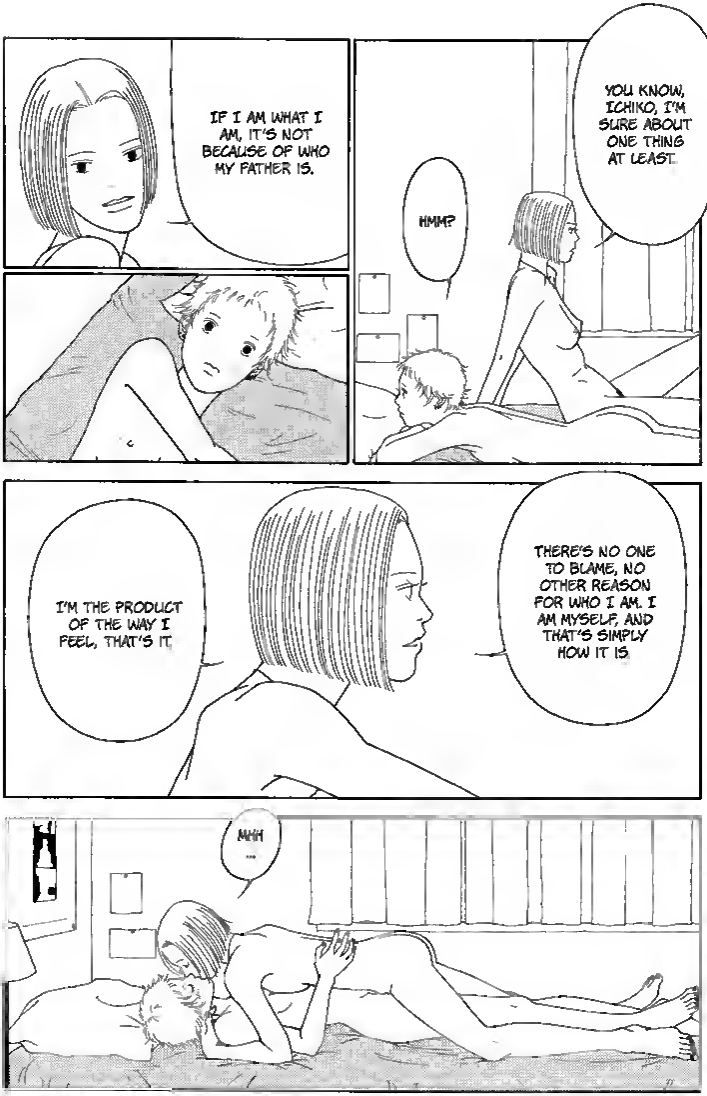

BUT WHEN SHE WAS YOUNGER, SHE WANTED TO GET INTO LITERATURE
OH, I SEE...
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT MY FATHER THINKS ABOUT IT, BUT MOM WAS REALLY HAPPY
SHE'S A HOUSEWIFE NOW...
ERI!
WHUH
DO YOU STILL HAVE A LITTLE TIME?
OH, I FORGOT YOU HAD YOUR JOB
I'M HAPPY!
YES, HAPPY!

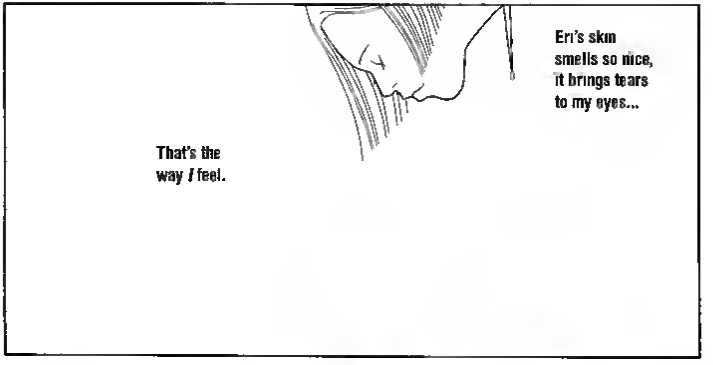
THANK YOU, ICHIKO...
WOW, THIS IS AWESOME, ICHIKO!
SO THAT'S THE KIND OF GIRL ER! IS!
I THOUGHT SHE HAD A GOOD TASTE BUT THIS IS...
OH, YOU DON'T SAY!

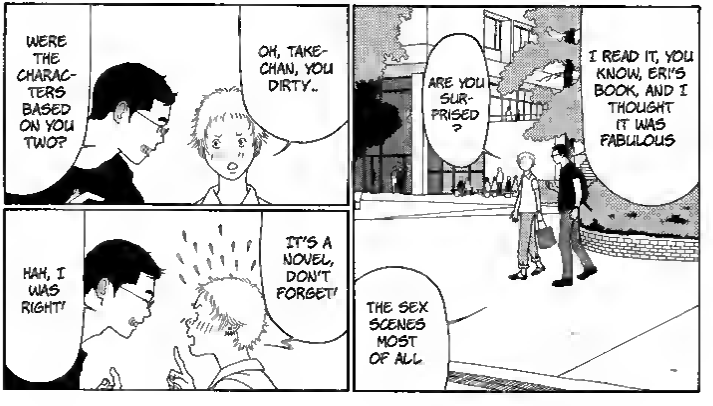
Oh, Dear God...

How thankful
I am to You!!


I WOULD CLOSE MY EYES AND THINK ABOUT YOU.
YOU KNOW
WHILE WE WERE APART, I OFTEN TOUCHED MYSELF...
TRUE?
I DID IT TOO, OF COURSE
REALLY ?
HOW ABOUT YOU?
OH, DON'T SAY THAT?
IT WAS WONDERFUL REMEMBERING YOUR EXPRESSION DURING THOSE MOMENTS WHERE YOU GO "AHHH" AND MAKE A FACE.

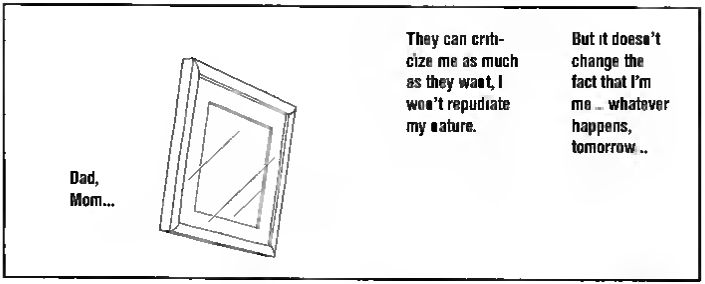

IF I AM WHAT I AM, IT'S NOT BECAUSE OF WHO MY FATHER IS.
HMM?
YOU KNOW, ICHIKO, I'M SURE ABOUT ONE THING AT LEAST.
I'M THE PRODUCT OF THE WAY I FEEL, THAT'S IT.
THERE'S NO ONE TO BLAME, NO OTHER REASON FOR WHO I AM. I AM MYSELF, AND THAT'S SIMPLY HOW IT IS.
MHH ...

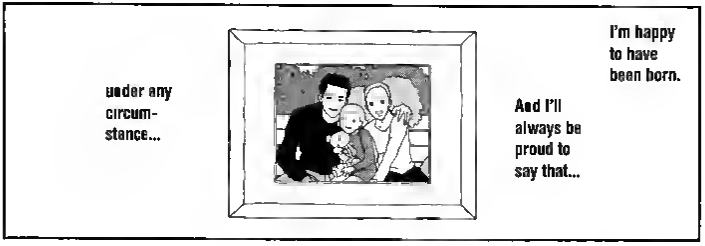



WERE THE CHARAC-TERS BASED ON YOU TWO?
OH, TAKE-CHAN, YOU DIRTY..
HAH, I WAS RIGHT!
IT'S A NOVEL, DON'T FORGET!
ARE YOU SUR-PRISED ?
I READ IT, YOU KNOW, ERI'S BOOK, AND I THOUGHT IT WAS FABULOUS
THE SEX SCENES MOST OF ALL

Ah, the future..

really has a way of escaping whatever we predict...


Dad,
Mom...
They can criticize me as much as they want, I won't repudiate my nature.
But it doesn't change the fact that I'm me... whatever happens, tomorrow...


under any circumstance...
I'm happy to have been born.
And I'll always be proud to say that...

I love my life!

THE END

AFTERWORD

After four years since my professional debut* as a comic artist, for various reasons I had to stop drawing comics. Two years passed and by the time I thought about starting again, I could not for the life of me remember how I used to create a plot, to divide the panels or to finish up the pencil manuscript. No matter how many times I reread my earlier comics, I just couldn't figure anything out. I managed to get some works done by readopting the "trial and error" method like a beginner, but the things that I forgot remained lost to me. Of course, I could just accept my situation and move on. But I didn't. And so I ended up being stuck at the same spot for many many years.

The character 'Ichiko' appeared in front of my mental eyes very abruptly while I was reading a thin book by a female American author to kill time. Then came Eri, to be followed instantly by Ichiko's dad and mom. After I got those four characters together, I could envision the entire first chapter of *Love My Life* at once. When I finished those first sixteen pages, I suddenly realized one thing: this was how I used to draw comics during those four years. That special feeling that had been lost for so long returned to me, much to my great surprise. Although I'm never satisfied with my finished works, I have to admit that *Love My Life* has become a special book for me. It's where everything begins.

Finally, as always I want to thank Mariko Bon-san, my editor-in-charge. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend special thanks to Yukio Hoshino-san for the wonderful cover design. By the same token, my gratitude goes out to all the readers who rooted for me while *Love My Life* was serialized in "Feel Young" and everyone who is holding this book in their hands right now. I love you all.

Goodbye. Until we meet again.

July 29, 2001

Ebine Yamaji

* Ebine Yamaji made her debut with the short story *Sankakuke no dessert* ("Triangle Dessert") which appeared in the November 1984 issue of Hakusensha's "Monthly Lala" magazine. She was 19 years old.